

Understanding Chess Exchanges



Bagheri
&
Salehzadeh



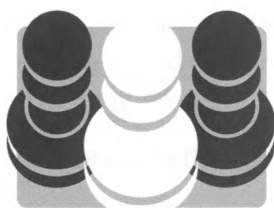
QUALITY CHESS



Understanding Chess Exchanges

By

Bagheri & Salehzadeh



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

First edition 2024 by Quality Chess UK Ltd

Copyright © 2024 Bagheri & Salehzadeh

UNDERSTANDING CHESS EXCHANGES

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-78483-198-1

Hardcover ISBN 978-1-78483-199-8

All sales or enquiries should be directed to Quality Chess UK Ltd,
Suite 247, Central Chambers, 11 Bothwell Street,
Glasgow G2 6LY, United Kingdom
Phone +44 141 204 2073
e-mail: info@qualitychess.co.uk
website: www.qualitychess.co.uk

Distributed in North and South America by National Book Network

Distributed in Rest of the World by Quality Chess UK Ltd through
Sunrise Handicrafts, ul. Szarugi 61, 21-002 Marysin, Poland

Typeset by Jacob Aagaard
Proofreading by Paul Brencher
Edited by Kostis Megalios
Cover design by Kallia Kleisarchaki
Photos (back cover & page 6) supplied by the authors

Printed in Estonia by Tallinna Raamatutrükikoja LLC

Preface

Exchanging pieces in chess is a subject lying deep within the foundations of our positional understanding. In reality, exchanging in chess bears many similarities to the sort of exchanges we can observe in economics, or the trades happening in our daily lives; the more profitable these exchanges are, the better it is for us.

Chess grandmasters are fully aware of the importance of exchanges and are always on the lookout for instances where a proper exchange might be profitable.

In this book, we have tried to strip complex games of their mysterious aura and break them down into simpler components, giving clear-cut explanations, and practical advice when necessary. We have tried our best to give the readers an easy interpretation of why grandmasters make certain decisions, and especially: how they decide which pieces need to be exchanged, and which need to stay on the board.

Of course, in this book, we will not only talk about exchanging pieces. It is impossible to conduct any discussion on strategy without firm knowledge of the basics, and we will very often dip our toes into many different aspects of positional chess, trying to shed light on as many basic principles as possible.

Most of the games in this book were played in the modern era, many even featuring young, up-and-coming talents that are still on their rise to the top. We did not want to rely on the already heavily discussed classics: chess is an insanely rich game, and instructive games are played every day by the strongest players of our time. Why not try to learn directly from them?

We hope that in this book you will be able to find many golden tips, the results of years of experience, that will help you improve your game.

Join us on this adventurous journey.

GM Amir Bagheri, FIDE Trainer Mohammad Reza Salehzadeh

August 2023

Contents

Preface	3
Key to Symbols used	6
Chapter One: Exchanges and Piece Activity	7
Improve your Worst-Placed Piece	7
Exchanging for Prophylaxis	22
Exchanging for Space	23
What Remains is Important	25
Exchanging in the Opening	27
Denying the Exchange	30
No Prejudice	34
The Duel	38
Breaking the Principle	44
Timing	48
Conclusion	53
Exercises	54
Solutions	58
Chapter Two: Exchanges and Space	71
Minor Pieces	71
Rooks	75
King	79
Space and Piece Activity	81
Playing with less Space	85
Exceptions to the Rules	98
Checkmate over Space	103
Overprotection	107
Conclusion	109
Exercises	110
Solutions	113
Chapter Three: Exchanges and Attack	123
Removing a Vital Defender	123
The Fianchettoed Bishop	126
Facilitating a Breakthrough	130
No Time to Lose	133

Destroying the King's Shelter	138
Opening a File	143
Attacking on a Colour Complex	146
Defusing an Attack	148
Conclusion	162
Exercises	163
Solutions	165
Chapter Four: Exchanges and Lasting Advantages	173
When Style Matters & Keeping the Tension	173
The Bishop Pair	176
Giving up the Bishop Pair	178
Playing Against the Bishop Pair	190
A Better Structure	204
The Queen Exchange	215
Denying a Queen Trade	227
Pawn Majority	230
The Powerful Queen and Knight duo	232
Transforming an Advantage	234
Conclusion	241
Exercises	242
Solutions	246
Chapter Five: Exchanges and Initiative	263
Activity Matters Most	263
The Initiative is worth more than a Pawn	272
Exchanging your Opponent's Active Pieces	278
Not all Activities are Created Equal	286
Material is just another Positional Factor	288
Mobile Pawn Centre	292
Opposite-Coloured Bishops	294
Exchanging to Create an Entry Point	303
Poking and Prodding	309
A Single Tempo	313
Tactics	315
Repelling the Initiative	322
The Principle of Two Weaknesses	326
Conclusion	332
Exercises	333
Solutions	336
Name Index	346
Game Index	349

Key to Symbols used

?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a dubious move
†	check
#	mate



Amir Bagheri, with one of his own paintings
in the background



Mohammad Reza Salehzadeh

Chapter 1

Exchanges and Piece Activity

From the beginning of the game, we should be thinking about putting our pieces in the best possible positions. It is otherwise impossible to achieve an attack or get the initiative. In that regard, it is only natural that the topic of improving your pieces is one of the most discussed themes in chess publications.

English chess Grandmaster and author, Michael Stean writes: “The most important feature of the Chess position is the activity of the pieces. This is fundamental in all phases of the game: Opening, Middlegame and especially Endgame. The primary constraint on a piece’s activity is the Pawn structure.”

Improve your Worst-Placed Piece

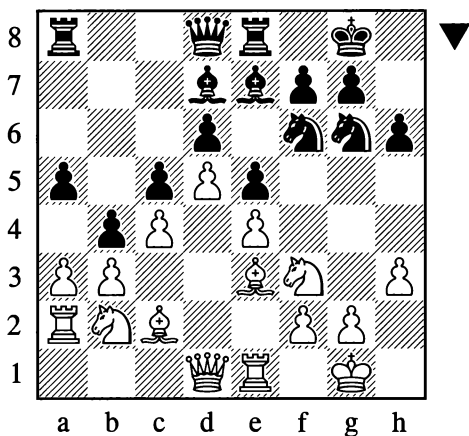
It often happens that you are in a good position, but it is not clear what to do next. In such positions, you probably have a bad piece, and you need to improve it. In many cases, a manoeuvre can bring your passive piece to an active position, and in doing so you have improved your position. But this is not the only possible way to solve the aforementioned problem. Proper exchanges are a very effective weapon to get rid of a bad piece. Sometimes we try to exchange a bad piece and sometimes an exchange prepares the ground for activating our bad piece. The latter could, for example, be the case, when our position lacks the necessary space to accommodate all of our pieces, or if a multitude of our pieces need to use the same square. Furthermore, exchanges can also be prophylactic in nature, and be used as a means to prevent the activation of the opponent’s pieces or eliminate his already active ones.

“The principle of the worst piece” is a useful method in this regard. In their book *Positional Play*, Dvoretsky and Yusupov say: “In positions of strategic manoeuvring (where time is not of decisive significance) seek the worst-placed piece. Activating that piece is often the most reliable way of improving your position as a whole.” It can be said though, that this principle is one of the oldest gems of chess wisdom, with the first person to talk about this principle being Adolf Anderssen (1818-1879): “Move that one of your pieces, which is in the worst plight, unless you can satisfy yourself that you can derive immediate advantage by an attack”.

Let's now see a game by the best player of our times in which he clearly displays the value of exchanging your worst-placed piece.

Francisco Vallejo Pons – Magnus Carlsen

Berlin (rapid) 2015



Black has a solid position and has gained more space on the queenside. His main problem is his dark-squared bishop, which is currently unemployed. Following the principle mentioned above, Carlsen finds his worst piece and intends to exchange it.

20...d7!

A multi-purpose move. Black mainly prepares ...d5, but also opens up the way for the f-pawn in some cases.

21.♖d2 d5!

Proposing the exchange of the f3-knight, so that an eventual ...d5 does not give away the pair of bishops.

It is not completely unreasonable to think about the immediate 21...d5, trying to exchange Black's worst-placed piece, but after 22.d5xg5 grabbing the pair of bishops, 22...d5xg5 and 23.f3!, White stops the numerous sacrificial possibilities of the black knights, and stabilizes his advantage with the pair of bishops and extra space.

22.d5xg5

If 22.d5h2, then 22...f5! 23.exf5 d5h4, and Black would achieve a pleasant position after retrieving the f5-pawn.

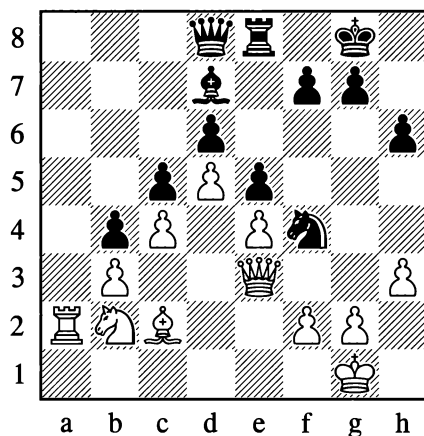
22...d5xg5

Now the bishop is safe to venture to g5.

23.axb4 d5xe3 24.♖xe3 axb4

Black has no problems.

25.♞e4 ♞xa2 26.♞xa2 d4f4



The position is almost equal but it is much easier to play with Black, due to White's bad bishop, which is surrounded by its own pawns, and Black's pressure on the white king. After this point, White has to play accurately to hold the balance. Generally speaking, the player having the initiative and prospects to attack the opponent's king, especially in a rapid game, has at least a practical advantage.

27.d3 ♖g5 28.dxf4 exf4 29.♖d3?!

A dubious move.

29.♖f3 would be better, keeping an eye on the f4-pawn and the kingside in general. 29...h5 30.♞a7 White has counterplay.

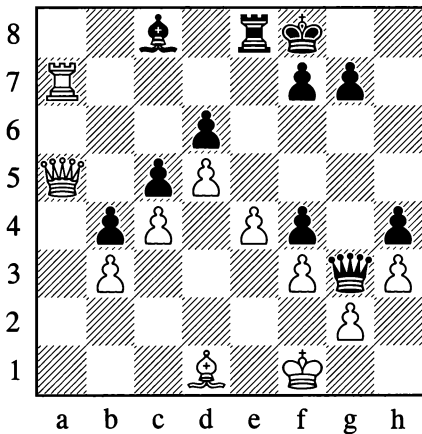
29...♖e5 30.♗d1 ♜f8 31.♙f1 ♚c8 32.f3
♗g5

Preparing ...♗g3. Carlsen slowly but surely enters the white camp.

33.♖a1 ♗g3 34.♚d1 h5 35.♝a7 h4 36.♗a5??

Neglecting the opponent's threat and severely misplacing the white queen.

White should have played: 36.♗a4 ♚xh3 (36...♗h2 37.♚e2 is equal, as Black can't crash through.) 37.gxh3 ♗xh3† 38.♙g1 ♗g3† 39.♙f1 Black only has a draw, as if 39...h3?? then 40.♗d7 ♗g2† 41.♙e1 ♗g6 42.♗xh3 and White would be winning.



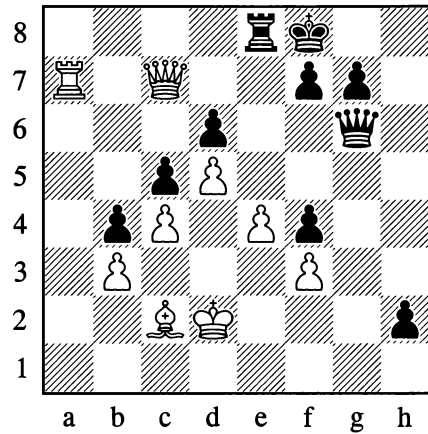
36...♚xh3!

Now, this sacrifice is strong and concludes Black's build-up.

37.gxh3 ♗xh3† 38.♙e1

After 38.♙g1 ♗g3† 39.♙f1 h3, Black would win.

38...♗g3† 39.♙d2 h3 40.♖c7 ♗g6 41.♚c2 h2



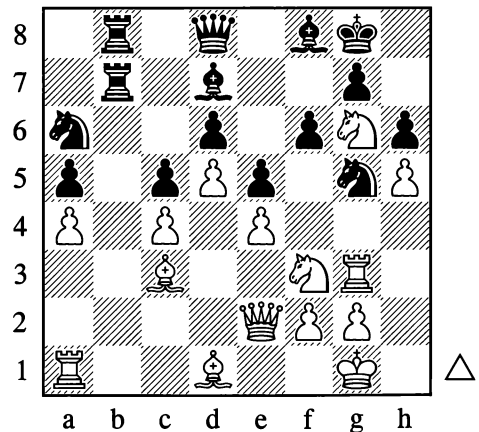
The game is over.

42.e5 ♗g2† 43.♙c1 h1=♖† 44.♙b2 ♗h5
45.♗xd6† ♙g8 46.♗e7 ♗xc2† 47.♙xc2
♗xe7
0–1

In the following example, the way the principle of “exchanging your worst-placed piece” was meticulously implemented by the young Karpov is truly spectacular.

Anatoly Karpov – Ulf Andersson

Stockholm 1969



Thanks to his d5-pawn, Karpov has a space advantage, and the opponent's bishop on f8

is extremely passive. Black indeed controls the open b-file, but, due to the lack of entry squares, it is of little use. What should be White's next step?

Take a look at the white pieces. They are all well-placed and the division of labour between them is well-done. The only problem is White's light-squared bishop, which is surrounded by his own pawns and does not prove itself useful for the time being. Following the worst-piece principle, Karpov decides to activate or exchange the bishop. If he manages to trade it with its counterpart, he will rule the light squares and especially the vital f5-outpost.

33. ♖d2!

Starting a strong plan. Karpov intends to transfer the knight to h2 via f1 and then, by replacing his queen and light-squared bishop, he will be able to exchange the bishop on g4. On top of that, since White has more space, he wants to avoid excessive exchanges; and this multi-faceted move, while avoiding the exchange of knights, also prevents the exchange of rooks by controlling the b1-square.

The immediate 33. ♖h2 allows 33...f5, with counterplay on the kingside.

33... ♖b4

The black knight looks nice on b4 but, as it clogs the b-file, it fails to impress.

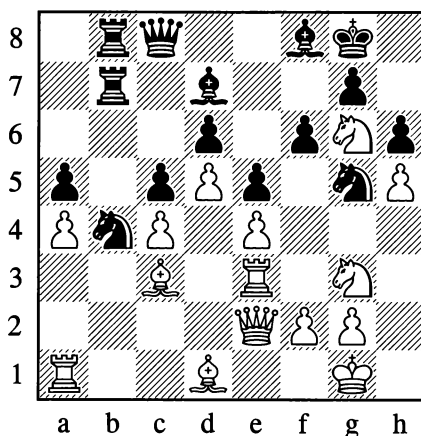
34. ♖e3

By defending the e4-pawn with the rook, Karpov frees his queen and knight.

34... ♖e8 35. ♖f1 ♖c8 36. ♖g3!

36. ♖h2? would be premature due to 36... ♖xg6! 37. hxg6 f5 with counterplay.

36... ♖d7



37. ♖d2!

Clearing the e2-square for the bishop. A subtle extra point that is good to note is that the black knight on b4 has stopped the activity of the black rooks. By putting the a5-pawn under pressure, Karpov makes it harder to move away the knight and open up the rooks.

37... ♖h7 38. ♖e2

Now clearing the d1-square for the queen! Karpov follows his plan step by step.

38... ♖f7 39. ♖d1 ♖e7 40. ♖f1

A more precise move order was 40. ♖h4!, keeping control of the f5-square, with the idea of ♖g3-f5 and ♖g4.

40... ♖d8

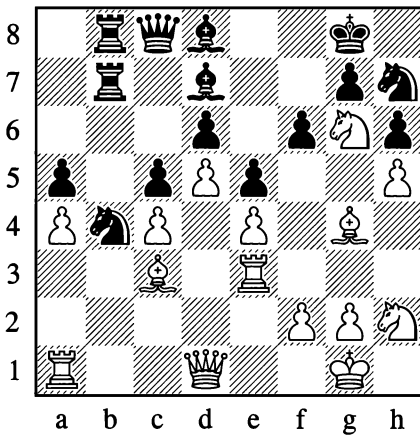
Defending the a5-pawn in order to free the knight on b4.

41. ♖h2 ♖g8?

41...f5! was necessary.

42. ♖g4!

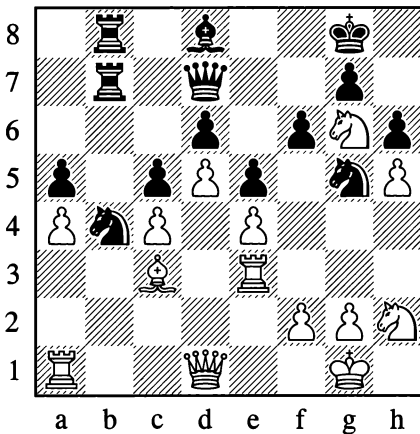
The move that Karpov was trying to prepare all along.



42...♘g5

42...f5! would again be correct.

43.♙xd7 ♖xd7



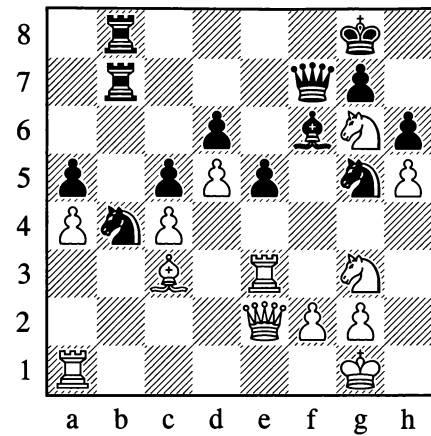
44.♘f1!

White's dream has finally come true, and he has obtained a huge advantage due to the domination of the light squares on the kingside. Now he intends to transfer his knight to f5.

44...f5

Otherwise, White would play ♘f1-g3-f5.

45.exf5 ♖xf5 46.♘g3 ♗f7 47.♗e2 ♙f6



48.♗f1!

White's pieces are superbly placed and much more active, so Karpov prepares to open the position with f2-f4.

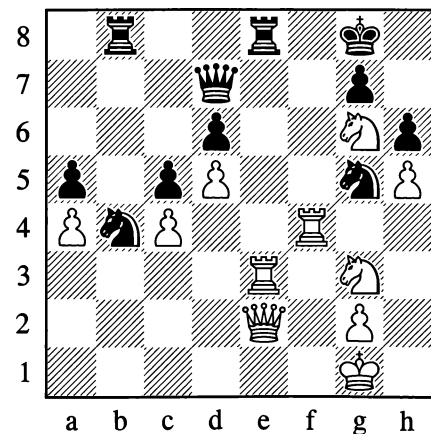
48...♗d7 49.f4!

It is true that the black bishop is bad but, due to the activity of the rest of White's pieces, the only thing that really counts is the attack against Black's king. Karpov is not the least bit bothered by the exchange of this seemingly passive bishop. It is, after all, one of the very few defenders of the black monarch.

49...exf4 50.♗xf4 ♙xc3 51.♗xc3 ♗e8 52.♗e3!

Because the opponent has a weak back rank, Karpov also offers an exchange of rooks.

52...♗bb8



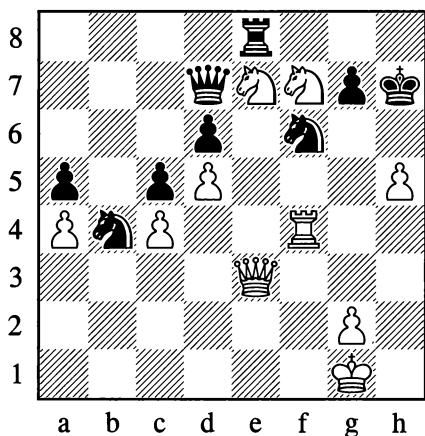
53. ♖f2!

Cleverly preventing the opponent from exchanging rooks by creating the threat of a back-rank mate.

53... ♖h7 54. ♖f5 ♖xe3 55. ♖xe3 ♖f6
56. ♖ge7 ♖h8 57. ♖xh6

White crashes through.

57... ♖e8 58. ♖f7 ♖h7

**59. ♖e4**

Karpov could have finished the game in style with: 59. ♖g5! Interestingly, the current Iranian grandmaster Pouya Idani found this continuation in the classroom at the age of eleven! 59... ♖h8 60. ♖xf6! gxf6 61. ♖f7 ♖g7 62. ♖h6 ♖xf7 63. ♖h7 ♖f8 64. ♖g6#

59... ♖xe7 60. ♖xe7

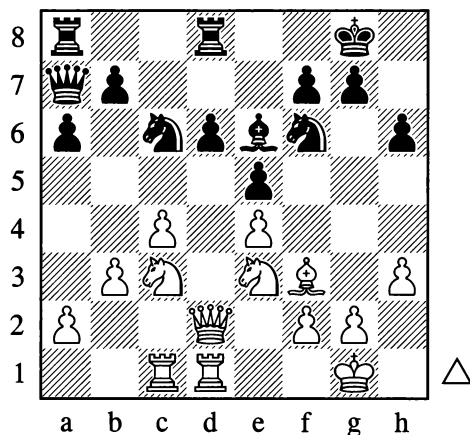
1-0

An impressive game by the young future World Champion. In a complicated position, he made almost every decision look simple by implementing the principle of exchanging his worst-placed piece. After his light-squared bishop managed to exchange itself with its counterpart, he had already obtained a winning positional advantage due to the disparity in the activity of all other pieces.

In the following game, Magnus Carlsen achieves an excellent position by following the same principle, and leads the game beautifully towards victory:

Magnus Carlsen – Hou Yifan

Wijk aan Zee 2015

**19. ♖g4!?**

An interesting idea. Carlsen finds his worst-placed piece and intends to get rid of it. However, due to the opponent's backward pawn on d6 and the weak d5-square, the following continuation would be more accurate:

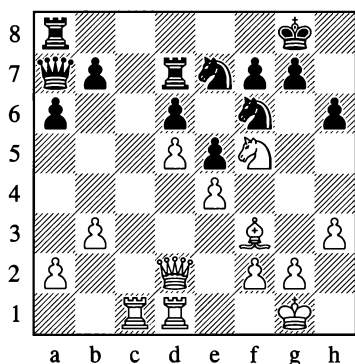
19. ♖f5!

We are now going to examine two options for Black.

Staying passive is not a good idea:

a) 19... ♖d7?! 20. ♖d5 ♖xd5 21. cxd5

Now the d4-square would be controlled.
21... ♖e7



22. ♖xc2!

Destroying the shelter of the black king, exploiting just how far the black queen is from the defence.

22...gxh6 23. ♖xh6 ♜g6 24. h4

Threatening to win a piece with h4-h5.

24...♗b8

Trying to get the queen back to the defence with a trick.

If 24...♜e8 25. ♗g4 ♜e7 26. ♖g5, White would again be winning.

25. h5 ♖f8 26. ♖g5 ♖g7

26...♜h7 27. ♖f5 White wins.

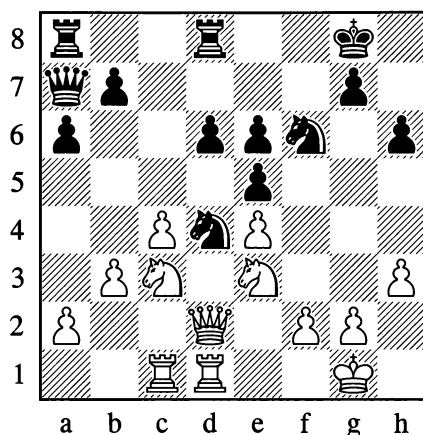
27. hxg6 ♖xg6 28. ♖xg6 fxg6

White has a healthy extra pawn.

b) For this reason, Black has to play: 19...♙xf5 20. exf5 ♜d4 21. ♖d3 ♜ac8 22. ♜d5 When White would be slightly better.

Imagine that you have an ugly, oddly coloured chair in your house that has damaged your home decor. There are two ways to solve this problem: to paint the chair according to your home decoration scheme, or to get rid of it. Carlsen, who has a bad light-squared bishop, decides to go for the second way!

19...♜d4 20. ♗xe6 fxe6



21. ♜c2 ♜xc2?!

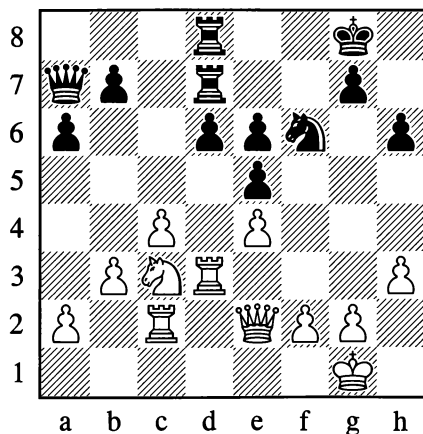
A dubious decision. Due to the weak d6-pawn, the exchange of the knights is in White's favour.

In order to obtain equality, 21...♜c6! should have been played. It is also important that, due to the weakness of the d4-square, the white knight on c2 would be tied down to its defence.

22. ♜xc2 ♜d7 23. ♖e2

White has a slight advantage.

23...♜ad8 24. ♜d3

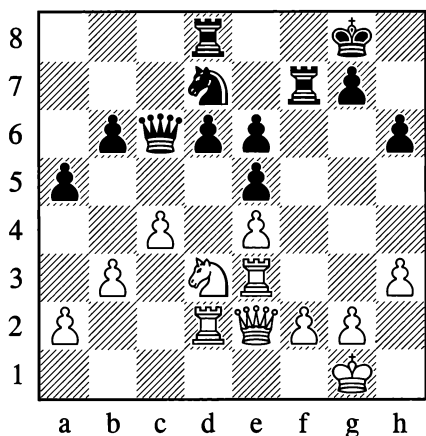


The rook has a bright future on the third rank.

24...♖c5 25.♘a4 ♖c6 26.♞e3 b6 27.♘b2
♞f7 28.♞d2 ♘d7 29.♘d3

Since the opponent cannot do much, Carlsen manoeuvres slowly and provokes her to create new weaknesses.

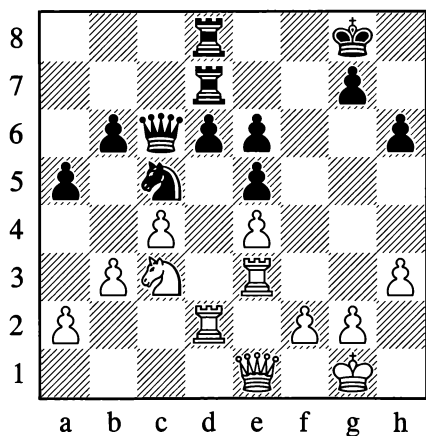
29...a5



30.♘b2!

A strong manoeuvre. Noticing the weakening of the b5-square, Carlsen now decides to transfer the knight to c3 via d1.

30...♘c5 31.♘d1 ♞df8 32.♞e1 ♞d8 33.♘c3
♞fd7



34.♞d1!

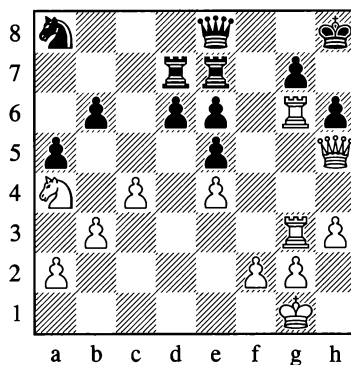
Now that Black's army is on the queenside, Magnus prepares to operate on the other side.

34...♘a6 35.♞h5 ♘c7 36.♞g3 ♖h8 37.♞dd3
♞e7 38.♞g6 ♞e8 39.♞dg3 ♞dd7 40.♘d1?

This move allows Black to put up further resistance.

There was a gorgeous way to end the game quickly:

40.♘a4! ♘a8



41.♖h2!!

A beautiful zugzwang!

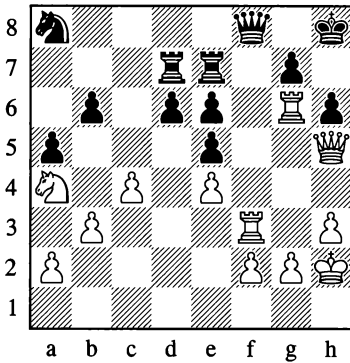
41.♞f3 can be met by 41...♞f7.

41...♞f8

Black would also not be able to save herself with other moves.

For example: 41...♞c7 42.♘c3! ♞cd7 43.♘b5
With this manoeuvre, White has practically paralyzed the black knight on a8, because 43...♘c7 leads to disaster: 44.♘xd6! ♞xd6 45.♞xh6† g×h6 46.♞xh6† ♞h7 47.♞f6† ♞g7 48.♞xg7#

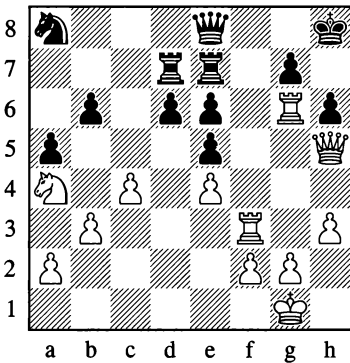
42.♞f3



42...♙c8

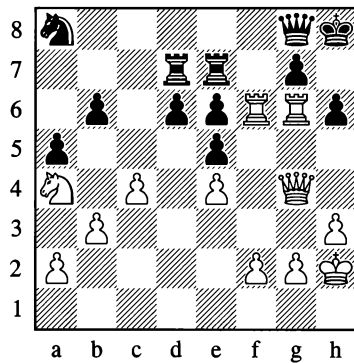
Let's examine two other queen moves:

a) 42...♙d8 43.♔g1! Another strong waiting move to force the opponent to bring her queen to e8. 43...♙e8 (After 43...♙b7 44.♙xh6+ gxf6 45.♙xh6+ ♔g8 46.♙g5+ ♔h8 47.♙h4+ ♔g8 48.♙g3+ White wins.)



44.♙ff6! White finally makes the combination he was waiting for, and the black resistance collapses. The important thing to note is that the player should seek to build and prepare a combination, and not just seek to execute it!

b) 42...♙e8 43.♙ff6 ♙g8 (43...gxf6 loses to 44.♙xh6+ ♔g7 45.♙h7+ ♔f8 46.♙h8+ ♔g7 47.♙h7#.) 44.♙g4



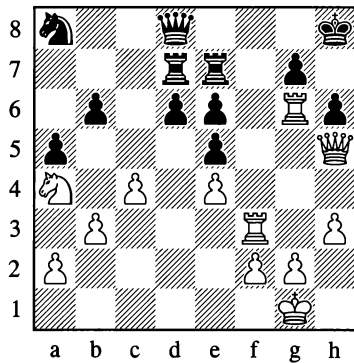
Comparing how the white pieces are placed in comparison to their counterparts says it all. 44...♙d8 45.♙xe6 White would be completely winning.

Back to 42...♙c8:

43.♔g1! ♙d8

If 43...♙g8 44.♙ff6 ♙b7 45.♙g4 ♔c7 46.♙f3 ♙b8 (46...♙e8 47.♙xh6+ wins) 47.♔xb6 the game would be over.

The text move also doesn't help.



44.g4! ♔g8 45.g5

One less defender for the black monarch.

45...hgx5 46.♙g3! ♙f8 47.♙3xg5 ♙f7 48.♙g4!

Now the h-file is open.

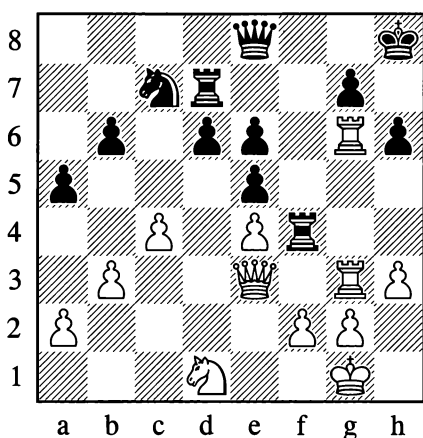
48...♙b7 49.♙h4 ♔f8 50.♙g4 ♙g8 51.♙hh6! ♔c7 52.♙h4

And ♙h8 next is unstoppable.

Back to the game:

40...♙f7 41.♙e2 ♙f4 42.♙e3

Threatening the b6-pawn.

**42...b5?**

A mistake that costs Black the game.

A better idea was to sacrifice the b6-pawn to gain counterplay:

42...♖a6! 43.♞g4

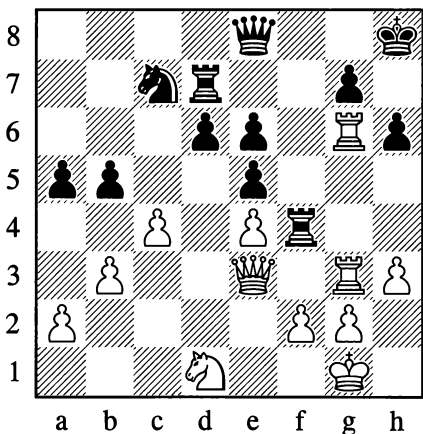
43.♞xb6 ♜c5 gives Black a lot of counterplay, as the white queen is stuck out of place on b6.

43...♞xg4 44.hxg4 ♜c5 45.g5 hxg5 46.♞xg5 ♜g8

Of course, not 46...♜xe4?!, due to 47.♞h4†, winning the knight.

47.♜c3 ♞e7

White still has a slight advantage, but Black has good chances to save the game.

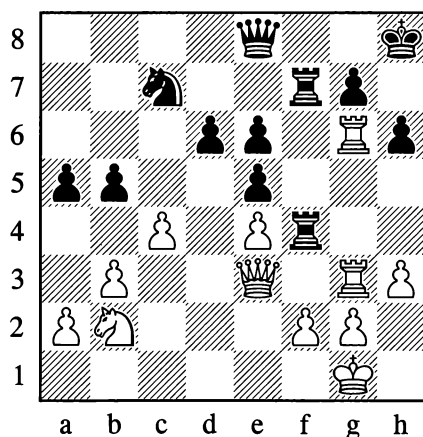
**43.♜b2!**

It is clear that Carlsen does not want to allow the black knight to be activated with 43.cxb5 ♜xb5, when the knight gets to d4.

43...♞df7?

In a difficult situation, mistakes come one after the other!

43...♞f8 offers more stubborn resistance, although 44.♜d3 bxc4 45.bxc4 leaves Black with severe problems due to her many weaknesses.

**44.c5!**

A decisive breakthrough. The e5-pawn is terribly weak if we remove its defender.

44...♞c6

After 44...dxc5?, White would win quickly: 45.♜d3! ♞h4 46.♜xe5 and Black could resign.

45.♜d3 b4 46.♞e2 ♞h4

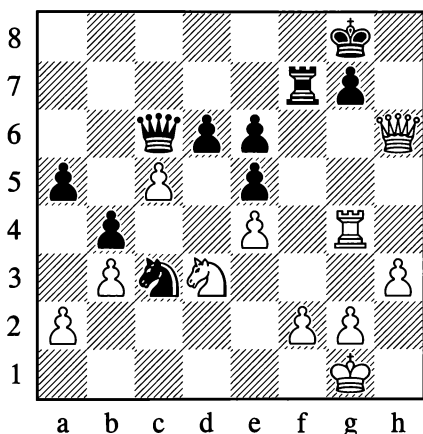
If 46...♞xe4 47.♞h5 White's threats would be indefensible.

47.♞g4 ♞xg4 48.♞xg4 ♜g8 49.♞h5 ♜b5 50.♞g4?

A mistake.

Correct would be: 50.cxd6 ♖xd6 51.♗xh6 ♜xe4 52.♗g6! Instead of defending his rook, White attacks the one on f7. 52...♜xg3 53.♗xf7† ♜xf7 54.♜xe5† ♜f6 55.♜xc6 And White wins.

50...♜c3 51.♗xh6



51...♜xe4?

Missing a golden opportunity.

51...♗xe4! should have been played: 52.♗xe4 gxf6 53.♗g4† ♜h7 54.cxd6 ♜d7 55.♜xe5 ♗xd6 56.♜c4 ♗a6 Due to the weakness of the white pawn on a2 and Black's active knight, Black would have good chances to draw.

52.♗xe6

It is impossible for Black to find a good defence against the incoming ♜xe5.

52...♜xf2? 53.♜xe5 ♜xh3† 54.♜h2!

Of course, not 54.gxf3?!, due to 54...♗xc5† 55.♜h1 ♗xe5 56.♗xe5 dxe5, and it would be White who would have to fight for a draw.

1–0

An adventurous and instructive game. In the starting position, White had a space advantage but the passive bishop on f3 was a nuisance. By grabbing the chance to exchange this bishop, Carlsen was left with all the trumps

of the space advantage and none of the negatives of a passive bishop. Afterwards, what tipped the scales even more in White's favour was the pair of knights getting off the board with 21...♜xc2?!. The c2-knight had become White's worst-placed piece, while the d4-knight was obviously Black's best.

This book has co-authors, but the following passage is by Amir Bagheri alone. Before the next game, it is useful to read his words about Igor Zaitsev, Anatoly Karpov's assistant, and to be aware of the importance that Zaitsev attached to the activities of the pieces:

“Many great coaches and champions have come to Iran, but no doubt the one who made the most impact on me, both technically and in terms of attitude, was Igor Zaitsev. I have never seen anyone among Grandmasters who loves chess as much as him. He loved chess and his job, and although we were 40 years apart in age, he was very energetic and very humble. He shared his memories of the legendary World Champion Anatoly Karpov. (Anatoly Karpov was my role model and a chess legend, and for this reason I played only the Nimzo-Indian and Caro-Kann all my life, imitating Karpov).

I remember that when we went to the north of Iran by bus for the 1998 Asian Youth Championships, Igor offered me blindfold chess training in a five-hour journey. This was one of the best exercises for me. He asked me and his other students to blindly solve tactical exercises.

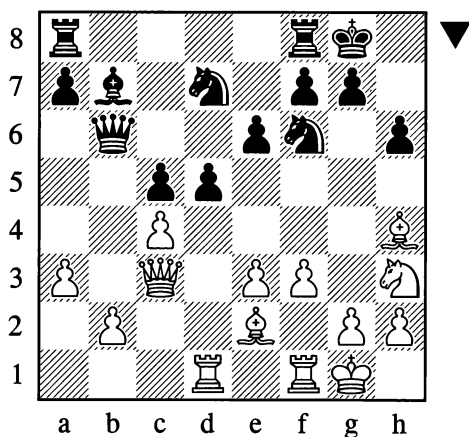
In my opinion, Igor cared more about the initiative and activity of the pieces than anything else, and what was very instructive for me was that he valued all possibilities and moves, sometimes even fantasy moves, and his eyes were like the eyes of an eagle, looking all over the board.

It was an honour for me to meet Igor and his wife. They were very kind, and working with them motivated me a lot. Igor and his training made my path to the grandmaster title go faster. This important influence on me happened in the year 2003. Igor has been my best role model for many years. I believe that if you work with Igor Zaitsev, you cannot fail to progress.

When I played in the Asian Youth Championship against Dao, a well-known and very tactical and attacking Vietnamese grandmaster, I was able to take advantage of Igor's preparations."

Thien Hai Dao – Amir Bagheri

Rasht 1998



White has the bishop pair but, due to the lack of cooperation of his pieces and Black's pressure on the semi-open b-file, the chances are equal.

15...♙a6!

Black wants to exchange the light-squared bishops, trying to get rid of White's bishop pair and his own somewhat passive bishop.

16.♞d2 ♞ab8 17.♞c1?!

17.♙g3 would be better: 17...♞b7 18.♙f2 with an unclear game.

17...♞fc8

It's often a good idea to place a rook on the same file as the opponent's queen.

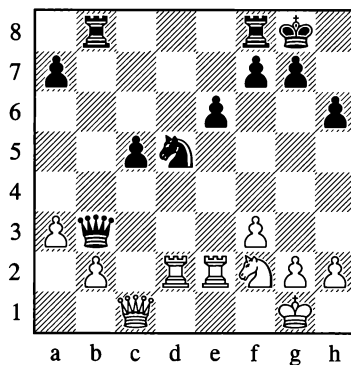
However, there was a stronger continuation: 17...♞b3!

Now White has two options:

a) 18.♙xf6?!

This move initiates a long, forcing line.

18...♙xf6 19.cxd5 ♞xe3† 20.♙f2 ♙xe2 21.♞e1 ♙xd5 22.♞xe2 ♞b3



23.♞xc5

23.♞c2 ♞b5 24.♞e4 ♞fc8 leaves White with no compensation for the pawn.

The text move also turns out badly for White.

23...♞fc8 24.♞d4 ♞c4!

Driving the queen away from controlling the d1-square.

25.♞e5

25.♞d3 doesn't help due to 25...♞c1†

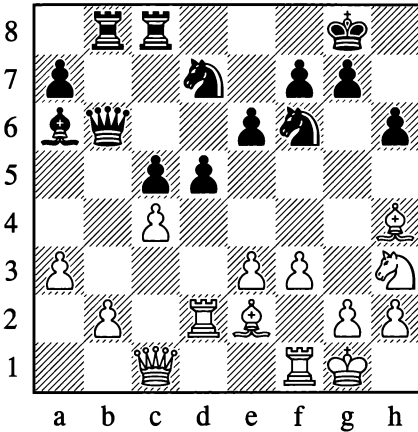
26.♙d1 ♞xd3 27.♞xd3 ♙f4 and Black wins.

25...♞c1† 26.♞e1 ♞bc8

White's pawn majority on the queenside is blocked, but Black can count on his majority on the kingside in the future. Moreover, Black's active pieces and safer king would give him a good advantage.

b) Instead, White should prefer 18.cxd5 ♙xe2 19.♞xe2 ♜xd5 20.e4 ♜5b6, with some pressure on the queenside.

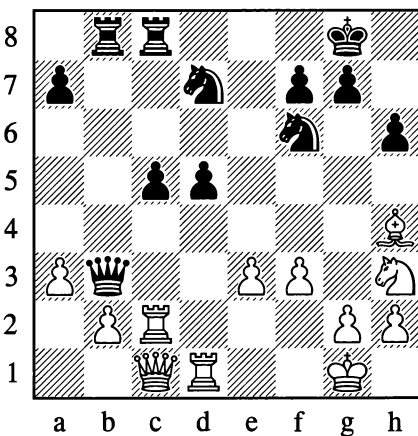
Now, let's get back to the game.



18.♞fd1 ♜b3

By increasing the pressure on the c4-pawn, Black wants to force his opponent to take the d5-pawn, when the light-squared bishops will get exchanged.

19.cxd5 ♙xe2 20.♞xe2 ♜xd5 21.♞c2



Black achieved his first goal by exchanging the bishops. Now he intends to create a central passed pawn. But how can the black d-pawn become a passed pawn? There are two ways to

do that: Black can advance the d-pawn in a timely manner or exchange his c5-pawn for the white e3-pawn.

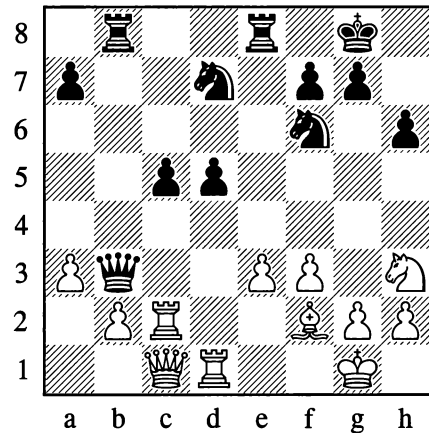
21...♞e8!

Black chooses the second way.

22.♙f2?

A mistake.

Correct is 22.♙xf6! ♜xf6 23.♞xc5 ♞xe3 with an equal position, although it seems easier to play as Black.



22...♜e5?!

Missing the opportunity to obtain an advantage.

22...g5! would be strong, in order to restrict the white knight.

23.♙g3 ♞b5 24.♜f2?!

This is not a good move.

A better option is:

24.♞c3

Intending to drive the queen away from b3, from where she was attacking the d1-rook.

24...♜xb2

Now White can play:

25.♞xc5

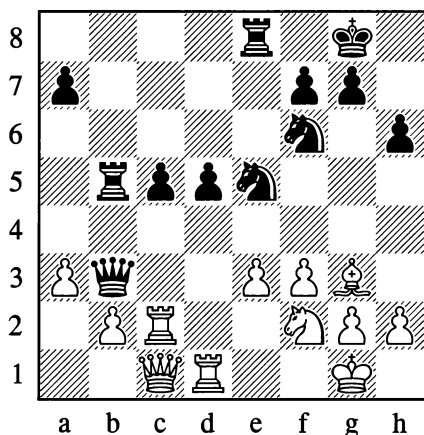
Eliminating the c5-pawn.

25...♠c4 26.♞xb5

But not 26.♞xb2 ♞xb2, when Black's active pieces and the weakness of the a3- and e3-pawns would give Black a definite advantage.

26...♞xb5 27.♞d3

The position would be roughly equal.



24...c4!?

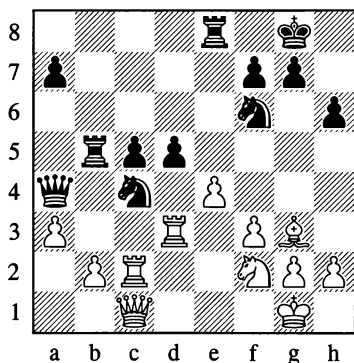
Since White cannot transfer his knight to the d4-outpost, this is an interesting move.

A good alternative is:

24...♠c4 25.♞d3 ♞a4

Black stands slightly better, due to the following point:

26.e4?



26...♠a5! 27.b4

27.exd5?? reveals Black's sneaky idea:

27...♞xc2! 28.♞xc2 ♞e1#

27.♠h4 is met by 27...c4 28.♞dc3 ♠d7

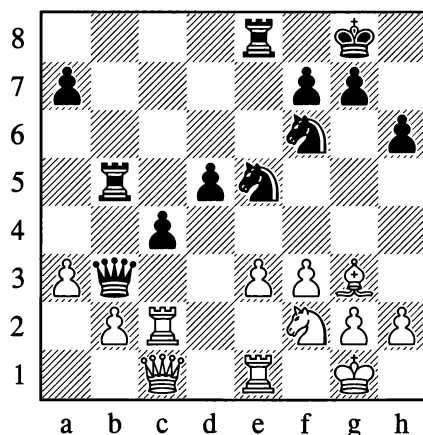
29.exd5 ♞xd5 when Black's strong c-pawn and active pieces would yield a decisive advantage.

27...cxb4 28.axb4 ♞xb4

Black has a huge advantage.

25.♞e1!?

After 25.♠xe5 ♞xe5 26.♞e2 ♞b7 27.♞d4 the chances would be equal.



25...d4!?

An interesting attempt to confuse the opponent.

25...♠fd7! with the idea of transferring the knight to c5, possibly using the b3- and d3-outposts in the future, is also worth considering.

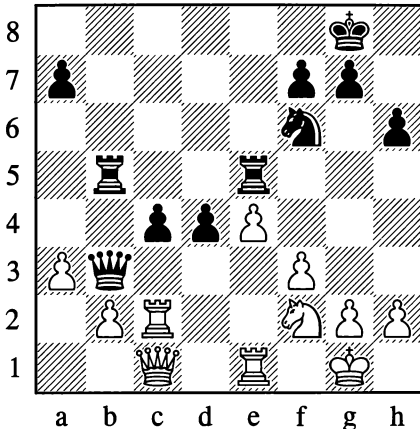
26.♠xe5

26.exd4?? is impossible due to 26...♠xf3+ 27.gxf3 ♞xe1+ 28.♞xe1 ♞xc2 and Black wins.

26...♞exe5 27.e4?

A mistake. By taking the pressure off Black's central pawn, White allows his opponent to take action on the kingside.

After 27.♖xc4 ♖xe3 28.♖xd4 ♖xe1† 29.♙xe1
♙xb2 Black would have only an edge.



27...♖g5!

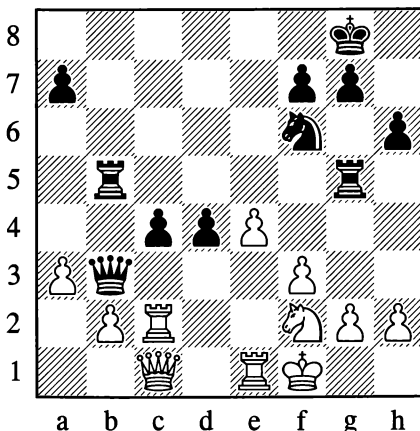
It's time to attack!

28.♔f1??

White does not realize the main threat of the opponent.

After 28.♔h3 ♖gc5, the white knight would be out of action, and Black could count on his strong c4- and d4-pawns.

28.h4! ♖g6 29.♔f1 would be the best try, although Black keeps a strong initiative.



28...♖xg2!

A surprising rook sacrifice!

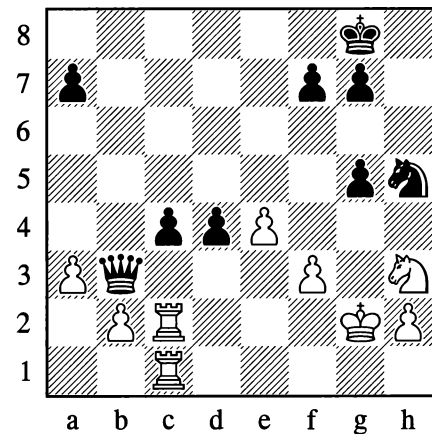
29.♔xg2 ♖g5† 30.♙xg5

30.♔f1 ♙xf3 wins for Black.

Also after 30.♔g4 ♔xg4 31.fxg4 ♖xg4† 32.♔f2 ♙h3 White is unable to repel Black's threats.

30...hxc5 31.♖ec1 ♔h5! 32.♔h3

After 32.♖xc4 ♔f4† 33.♔f1 (33.♔g3 ♔e2† wins) 33...♙xf3 Black's powerful queen/knight team creates irresistible threats to the opponent's king.



32...♙e3!

After crashing through with ...g5-g4, Black will gain easy access to the opponent's king.

33.♖xc4 g4 34.♖c8† ♔h7 35.fxg4 ♙xe4† 36.♔f1 ♙f3† 37.♔e1

37.♔f2 ♔f4 traps White's king in a mating net.

37...♙e3† 38.♔d1 d3

White decided to call it a day.

0-1

In the starting position White had the two bishops, but Black was much more active. His worst-placed piece was the b7-bishop, so managing to exchange it was an important achievement. This exchange simultaneously removed White's main advantage (the bishop pair), thus making Black's life significantly easier.

Afterwards, another interesting possible exchange was the c5- for the e3-pawn. This exchange was, in general, helpful for Black, as he would be the one getting the only advanced pawn in the position. White should nevertheless have allowed this exchange (22.♙xf6! instead of 22.♙f2?), as avoiding it eventually led to much bigger problems, with Black having an insanely strong pawn duo on c4 and d4.

The game we just witnessed is also a good example of how the activity of the pieces tends to overshadow structural factors. However, we should not get carried away with our own active plans. We need to remember that chess is a game played by two players, and not only one.

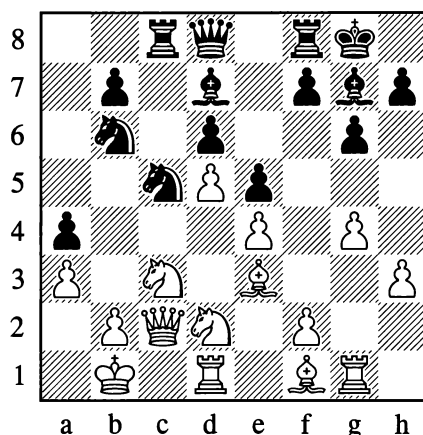
Exchanging for Prophylaxis

When we have the chance to squash the opponent's counterplay and create one-sided situations, we should almost always take it. One of the best-known players for squeezing their opponents without leaving them a shred of counterplay is, of course, Magnus Carlsen.

Magnus Carlsen – Veselin Topalov

Nanjing 2009

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0–0 6.h3 ♘a6 7.♙e3 e5 8.d5 c6 9.g4 ♘c5 10.♘d2 a5 11.a3 ♘fd7 12.♙g1 a4 13.♙c2 ♘b6 14.0–0–0 ♙d7 15.♙b1 cxd5 16.cxd5 ♙c8



In this opposite-side castling position, White is ready to push his kingside pawns to open a file to attack Black's king. On the other hand, Black's well-placed pieces on the queenside and the hole on b3 can be a concern for him.

17.♙b5!

A strong positional move. Before concentrating on his attack, Carlsen exchanges Black's good light-squared bishop, aiming to weaken the light squares in the enemy camp and target the a4-pawn.

17.h4!? would also be interesting. The point is revealed after 17...♙xh4? 18.g5, when the black queen would be in trouble.

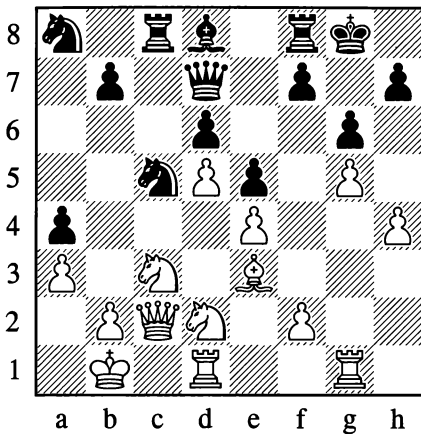
17...♙xb5 18.♘xb5 ♙d7 19.♘c3

Black's main problem is how to launch a counterattack on the queenside. For the time being, his b-pawn is blocked, and if he wants to open its path by moving the b6-knight, the pawn on a4 will be removed from the board.

19...♙f6

Black wants to transfer the bishop to the queenside via d8.

20.g5 ♙d8 21.h4 ♘a8



Black finally decides to release his b-pawn and bring his bishop to a5. However, this will come at the cost of the a4-pawn.

22. ♖xc5 ♜xc5 23. ♔xa4

White is a pawn up, his pieces are well-placed, and Black has no compensation for his material deficit. Carlsen won the game without any problems.

...1–0

In this example, White had the chance to go for the attack immediately with 17.h4, and that would have been an objectively fine choice. However, in contrast to the game continuation, the game would become double-edged. By exchanging the light-squared bishops, Carlsen guaranteed a one-sided situation, after which his moves became practically much easier to find. This is almost always the choice of top players when faced with such a dilemma: killing the opponent's counterplay is practically always better.

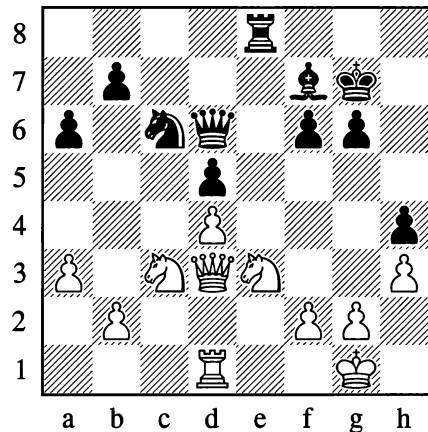
Exchanging for Space

Sometimes, to improve the position of a passive piece, we use methods other than exchanging it. We will delve deeper into all the intricacies of the relationship between exchanges and space in the next chapter. However, it is useful to note here that one of these methods is to increase the activity of a bad piece by creating more space for it. This can be done by exchanging other pieces.

Let's take a look at an instructive example:

Wang Hao – Fabiano Caruana

Ekaterinburg 2021



The black bishop is restricted by the pawns on d5 and g6 and needs to be improved. But how to do that?

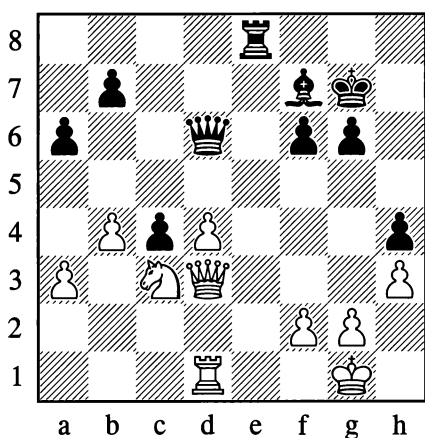
27... ♖a5!

A logical move. Caruana intends to use the outpost on c4 as a place to exchange the knights. This will also increase the radius of action of the bishop on f7.

28.b4?!

An unnecessary and weakening move.

28... ♖c4 29. ♖xc4 dxc4

**30.♞d2?!**

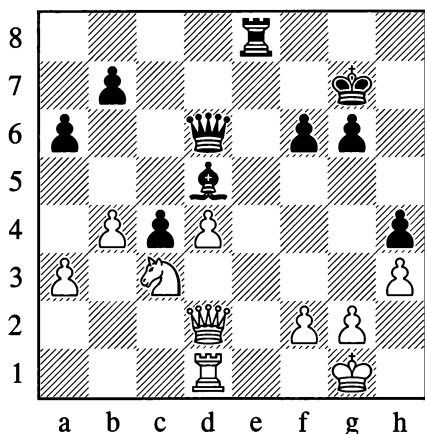
A dubious move that allows Black to blockade the d4-pawn.

White should have gained a tempo by attacking the b7-pawn: 30.♞f3 b5 31.d5 with level chances.

30...♙d5

Now the bishop has a fine new home on d5, operating on the long diagonal. However, the knight on c3 is also well placed, blockading the c4-pawn and fighting for the d5-square. This means, that the bishop on d5 will always need protection.

30...g5! would be even stronger, showing another way to activate the bishop: 31.d5 ♙g6 32.♞d4 ♙c2 33.♞c1 ♙d3 After establishing the bishop on the d3-outpost, Black stands better.

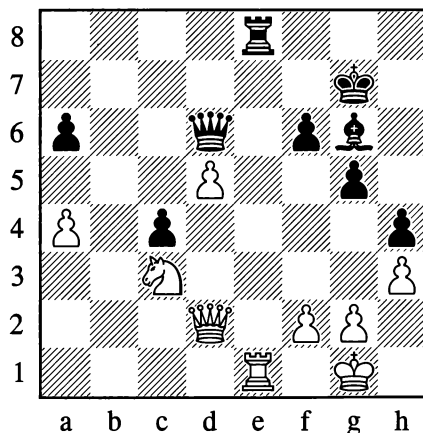
**31.b5**

Trying to prevent the c4-pawn from becoming a protected passed pawn.

Maybe it was better to try 31.♞e1 ♞xe1† 32.♞xe1 b5 with an unclear game. It is true that Black's protected passed pawn on c4 is strong, but the c3-knight is an excellent blockader and Black's king is also a bit exposed, so the chances are balanced.

31...♙f7 32.bxa6 bxa6 33.a4 g5 34.d5

White should have tried to activate his rook with 34.♞b1 ♙g6 35.♞b7† ♞e7 36.♞b2, when Black would still have a slight advantage, but this was the better continuation for White in order to achieve an active game.

34...♙g6 35.♞e1**35...♞f4!**

Caruana activates his pieces by using a deflection tactic.

36.♞d1 ♙c2! 37.♞a1 ♞e5! 38.♞xe5?

White misses his last chance.

38.a5 should have been played, getting the a4-pawn out of trouble, without helping Black to centralize his queen and threaten the d5-pawn.

38...♞xe5

The black queen is much more active than its counterpart, and it is obvious that in this open position, the black bishop is much better than the white knight.

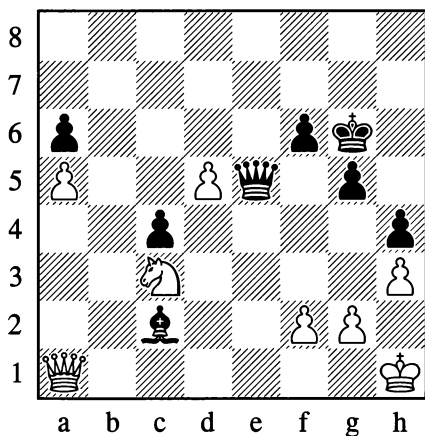
39.a5 ♖g6

39...♗e4 would be premature, due to 40.♞e1.

40.♖h1?

White's position was already bad, but this mistake decides the game immediately.

40.f3 would have put up more stubborn resistance.

**40...♗e4! 41.d6**

Now 41.♞e1?? doesn't work, due to 41...♗xg2†.

41...♗c6 42.♞b2 ♞xd6

Black is a healthy pawn up, and his bishop is stronger than the opponent's knight in this open position. White's king is weak, and the pawn on a5 can also be targeted. Therefore, White resigned.

0-1

Who could have imagined that the f7-bishop would have played such a big role in Black's win just by looking at the starting position? However, after exchanging the knights on c4, Black created space for the bishop to show its real power. A prime example of activating a piece by exchanging another.

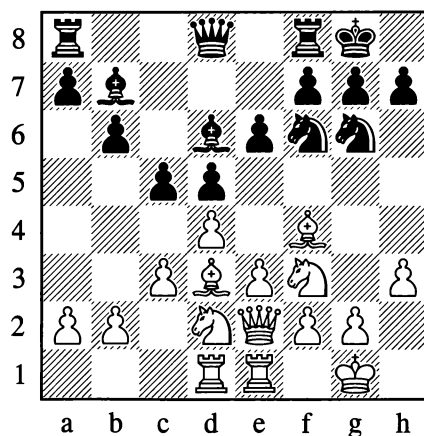
What Remains is Important

Chess is a game that has no memory: only the present and future are important. This means that when thinking about which pieces to exchange, we should not focus only on the ones leaving the chessboard. In fact, it is good to live by the motto: "What remains is important". The goal is for the activity of our whole army to be increased, no matter who gets sacrificed.

Magnus Carlsen – Evgeny Tomashevsky

Wijk aan Zee 2016

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.♗f4 b6 4.e3 ♗b7 5.h3
♗e7 6.♗d3 0-0 7.0-0 c5 8.c3 ♘c6 9.♘bd2
d5 10.♞e2 ♗d6 11.♞fe1 ♘e7 12.♞ad1 ♘g6

**13.♗xg6!**

A move in line with Carlsen's style. He is always looking for the simplest and most

straightforward way to obtain a pleasant advantage. He gives up his beautiful light-squared bishop for the opponent's knight, but only what remains on the board matters. After another exchange on the next move, he will have a comfortable game ahead, with a good knight versus a bad bishop.

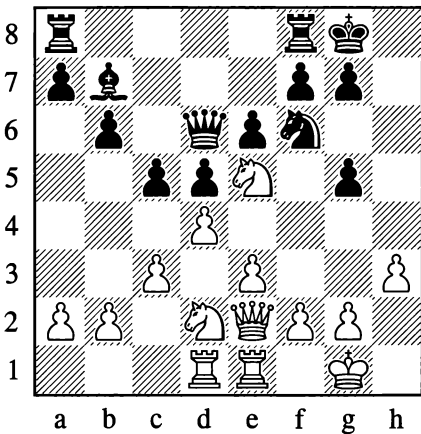
13...hxf6 14.♗xd6 ♖xd6 15.♞e5

White is slightly better. After exchanging his dark-squared bishop, White intends to go for the Stonewall structure by playing f2-f4. It is also important to note that the white knight is hard to remove from e5 with ...f7-f6, due to the weakness of the g6-pawn.

15...g5

Intending to dissuade White from playing f2-f4.

A continuation such as 15...♖ac8 16.f4 ♖c7 17.g4 would give White a dangerous attack.



16.f4!

White plays it anyway! By using the g5-pawn as a hook, White intends to open the kingside and attack the black king.

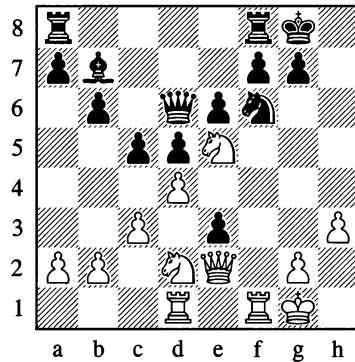
16...gxf4 17.♖f1!

Excellent! Carlsen shows that he not only plays well in positional situations, but also excels in tactical positions which require accurate calculation.

The game move is much better than 17.exf4?! cxd4 18.cxd4 ♖ac8 when, thanks to the open c-file, Black would obtain counterplay.

17...♞d7

17...fxe3 walks headfirst into White's idea:



18.♖xf6! A beautiful exchange sacrifice. After 18...gxf6 19.♖g4† ♔h7 20.♖f1 exd2 21.♖f4 White is winning, while in the event of 18...exd2 19.♖xd2 ♖d8 20.♖f4 White's attack on the black king would again be decisive.

It is too late for Black to walk away from complications with 17...cxd4, because 18.exd4 gives White a winning position. Compared to the 17.exf4 line mentioned above, the c-file is not open to give Black counterplay.

18.♖h5 ♞f6 19.♖h4 ♖d8

19...fxe3

This move is again strongly met by:

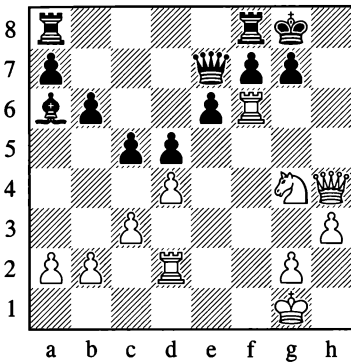
20.♖xf6! ♖e7

20...gxf6 loses by force to: 21.♖g4† ♔h7

22.♖f1! exd2 23.♖f4 fxe5 24.♖h5† ♔g7

25.♖g5† ♔h7 26.♖h4#

21.♞g4 exd2 22.♖xd2 ♖a6



23. ♖h6†!

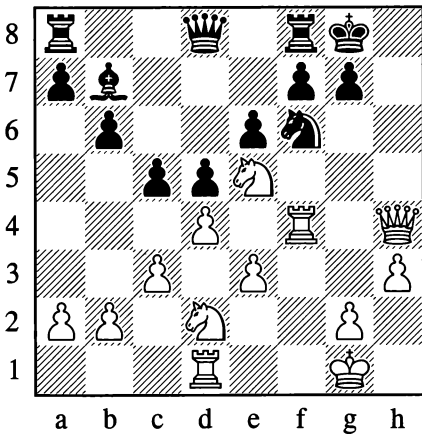
Forcing the g7-pawn to disappear at last.

23...gxh6 24. ♕g3† ♔h7 25. ♖df2

Black would not have an adequate defence against White's lethal threat of ♕e3.

20. ♖xf4

White's initiative on the kingside is very dangerous. He has got his pawn back, and the bad black bishop is completely out of action.

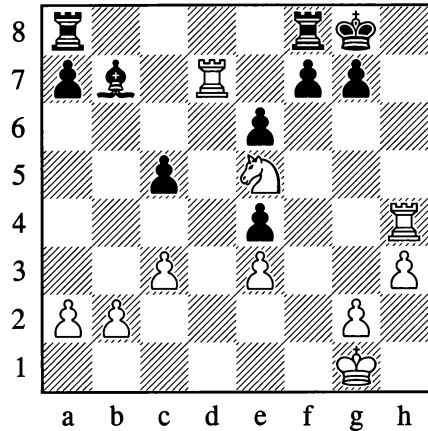


20...♖e4?!

This move, which leads to the exchange of Black's queen and knight, makes White's task even easier.

20...cxd4 21. exd4 ♖e4 would be better. After 22. ♕e1 ♖d6 Black can continue fighting, but White's advantage is still significant.

21. ♖xe4 ♕xh4 22. ♖xh4 dxe4 23. dxc5 bxc5 24. ♖d7



White's rook penetrates Black's camp via the seventh rank and can easily attack the opponent's weak pawns. Carlsen accurately puts the game away in just a few moves.

24...♖ab8 25. b3 a5 26. ♖c7 a4 27. bxa4 ♔a8 28. a5 ♖b7 29. ♖xc5 ♖a7 30. ♖c4 1–0

Carlsen's d3-bishop looked nice, but by exchanging it he managed to activate all his other pieces. After that, the attack was simply crushing.

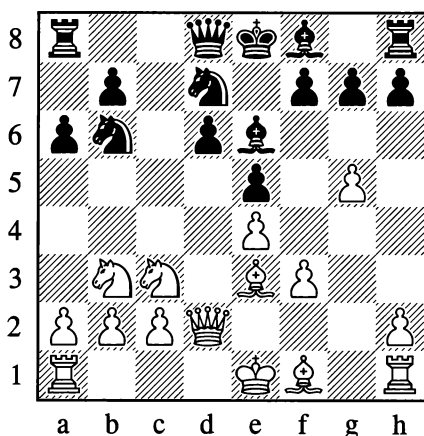
Exchanging in the Opening

Siegbert Tarrasch famously stated: "If one piece is bad, the whole position is bad". We should never accept playing with a bad piece without fighting to activate or exchange it. The operation of activating a bad piece by an exchange can be implemented as early as the opening stage.

David Paravyan – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

Krasnaya Polyana 2021

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6
 5.♗c3 a6 6.♙e3 e5 7.♗b3 ♙e6 8.f3 ♗bd7
 9.g4 ♗b6 10.g5 ♗fd7 11.♙d2



The black bishop on f8 is bad, and Black should find a way to activate or exchange it.

11...h6!

The beginning of a subtle way to exchange Black's worst piece.

12.gxh6

12.0-0-0 hgx5 13.♙xg5 ♙e7! 14.♙xe7 ♙xe7 15.♙xd6 ♙xd6 16.♙xd6 0-0-0 17.♙d2 g6 gave Black enough compensation for the pawn in Sutton – Williamson, email 2014.

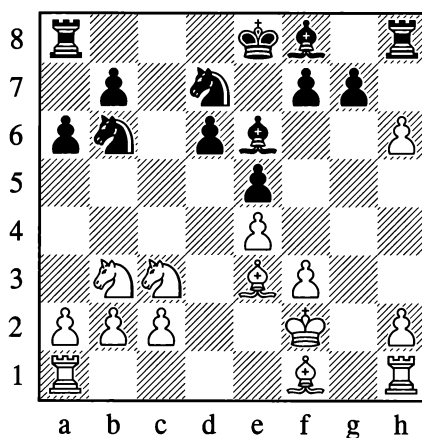
12...♙h4† 13.♙f2

13.♙f2 can be met by 13...♙xh6 14.♙xh6 ♙xh6 15.0-0-0 ♙e7 when Black's position is preferable because of his better pawn structure.

13...♙xf2† 14.♙xf2?

A mistake.

It would have been better for White to keep his dark-squared bishop: 14.♙f2 g6 15.0-0-0 ♙xh6† 16.♙b1 gives equal chances.

**14...g6!**

The main point of Black's operation. His dark-squared bishop enters the game.

15.♙d1 0-0-0

15...♙e7! would be better: 16.♗a5 ♙b8 17.h4 ♙xh6 18.♙xh6 ♙xh6 with a slight advantage for Black.

16.h4 ♙c7 17.♙e2 ♙xh6 18.♙g5 f6 19.♙d2 ♙xd2 20.♗xd2 ♙h6 21.♙dg1 ♙dh8

Black has obtained a better position. In addition to the pressure on the h-pawn, he is threatening to break in the centre with ...d6-d5. The game was eventually drawn. ...1/2-1/2

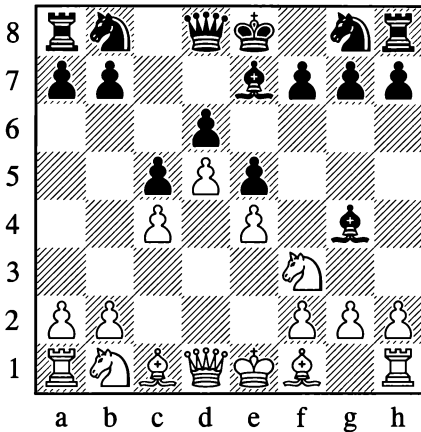
Some of us mere mortals would think that the f8-bishop can't do anything productive, and we would have concentrated on playing with our other pieces. Not the top players in the world though. If there is a way to get rid of a passive piece, they will find it!

In the next example, we will witness an opening battle go the other way round. White stops Black from exchanging his passive piece, guaranteeing himself the more pleasant game.

Etienne Bacrot – Vadim Zvjaginsev

Moscow 2010

1.d4 c5 2.d5 d6 3.c4 e5 4.e4 ♖e7 5.♟f3 ♙g4



In this opening, Black first puts his central pawns on the dark squares, and then tries to exchange the dark-squared bishops. If successful, he will be in a comfortable position due to the opponent's bad remaining bishop.

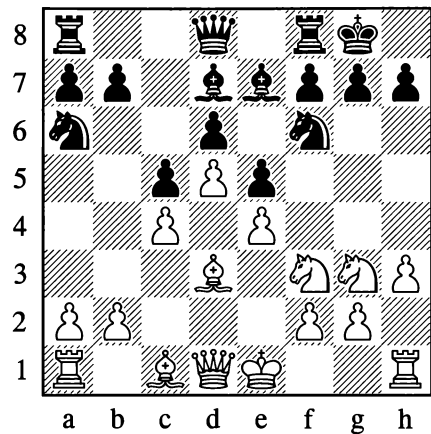
6.♟bd2!

This move is White's best response, giving him a slight advantage. White stops Black's plan of ...♙xf3 and ...♙g5, and allows his opponent to only exchange his dark-squared bishop if he agrees to White maintaining the two-bishop advantage.

6...♟f6

After 6...♙g5 7.♞a4† ♙d7 8.♞b3 ♙xd2† 9.♙xd2 b6 10.♙d3 ♟e7 11.♞c2 0-0 12.0-0 White got a slight advantage due to his bishop pair and extra space in Bai Jinshi – Wen Yang, China 2015.

7.♙d3 0-0 8.h3 ♙d7 9.♟f1 ♟a6 10.♟g3



White has prevented his opponent from exchanging his dark-squared bishop and has a better position due to his space advantage. The game was eventually drawn after a long struggle.

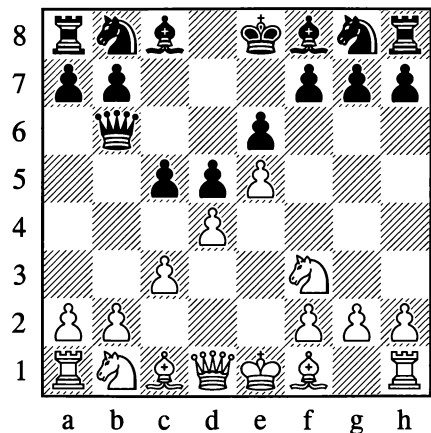
...½-½

Let us see another example on the same topic. The French Defence is notorious for leaving Black with a passive light-squared bishop, but that's not always the case:

Santosh Gujrathi Vidit – Richard Rapport

Belgrade 2022

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♞b6 5.♟f3



5...♘d7!?

An interesting line that has been the favourite of great French Defence experts such as Mikhail Gurevich and Sergey Volkov. Black intends to get rid of his bad bishop as soon as possible.

6.♘e2 cxd4

6...♘b5 can be met by 7.c4!? ♘xc4 8.♘xc4 dxc4 9.d5, when White has the initiative.

7.cxd4 ♘b5 8.♘xb5† ♖xb5 9.♖c3 ♖a6 10.a4 ♘b4

With equality, since all of Black's pieces get to reasonable squares.

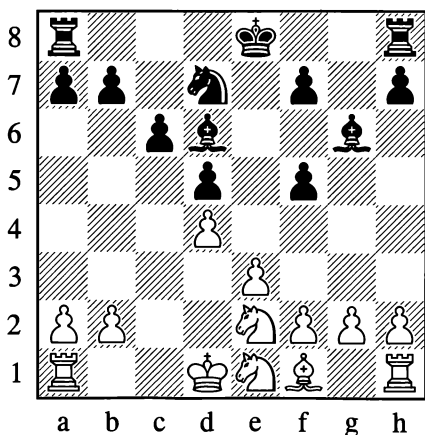
...0-1

Here is another recent example of getting rid of a bad piece in the opening, from the Iranian grandmaster Mohammad Amin Tabatabaei.

Nikita Vitiugov – M. Amin Tabatabaei

Belgrade 2022

1.c4 e6 2.♖c3 d5 3.d4 ♖f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♘g5 c6 6.e3 ♘f5 7.♖f3 ♘g6 8.♘xf6 ♖xf6 9.♖xf6 gxf6 10.♖f3 ♖d7 11.♖h4 ♘e7 12.♖e2 f5 13.♖f3 ♘b4† 14.♖d1 ♘d6 15.♖e1



15...♘h5!?

An interesting move. Black gives up his two-bishop advantage to get rid of his bad bishop.

16.♖d3

If 16.f3, the white e3-pawn would become weak.

16...♘xe2†! 17.♖xe2 ♖e7 18.g3 a5 19.♘h3 ♖f6

White is still slightly better due to his better structure, but Black has no serious problems as all his weak spots are comfortably protected. The game eventually ended in a draw.

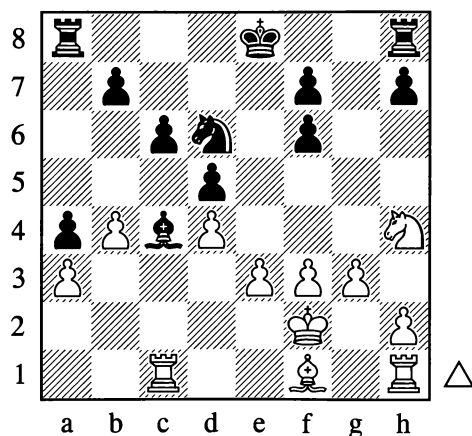
...½-½

Denying the Exchange

Just as it is important for us to activate our worst piece, it is also important to prevent your opponent from activating or exchanging his own bad pieces. In the next game, we are going to witness a young Magnus Carlsen exploiting his opponent's bad pieces just by keeping them on the board, in a spectacular display of positional understanding.

Magnus Carlsen – Zurab Azmaiparashvili

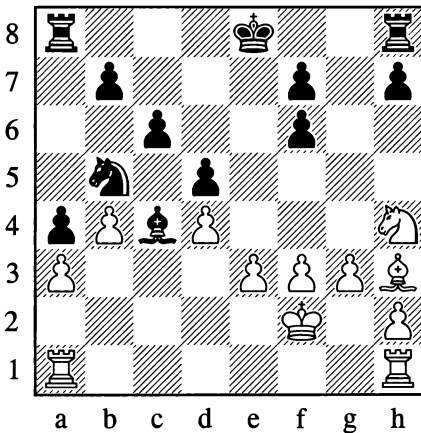
Khanty-Mansiysk 2005



21.♘h3!

Carlsen correctly avoids the exchange of bishops, and leaves his opponent no choice but to keep a bishop on c4 that cannot do anything. On top of that, by transferring his bishop to the h3-c8 diagonal, White controls a lot of important squares inside the Black camp.

21...♘b5 22.♖a1



22...0-0?!

It would have been better for Black to keep his king in the centre and play 22...♔e7!. However, White would still have a better position, due to the better pawn structure and the opponent's idle bishop. It is important to note that 23.♘f5† accomplishes absolutely nothing after 23...♔f8, when the engine's top choice is to go back with 24.♘h4! The f5-square is needed for the bishop, which should get transferred to c2 as it later happened in the game.

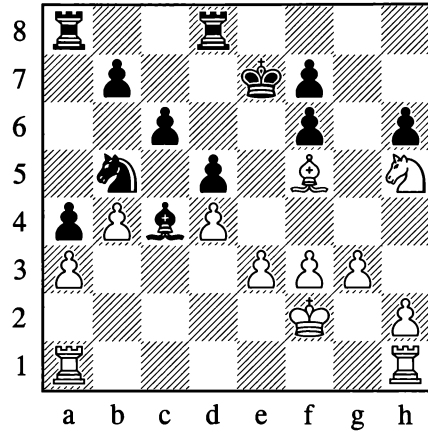
23.♘g2 ♗fd8 24.♘f4

24.♙f5!? would be interesting: 24...♘d6 25.♙c2 and White would have a significant advantage. The bishop is well placed on c2, influencing events on both sides of the board.

24...♔f8?!

24...♘d6 would be better, controlling the f5-square.

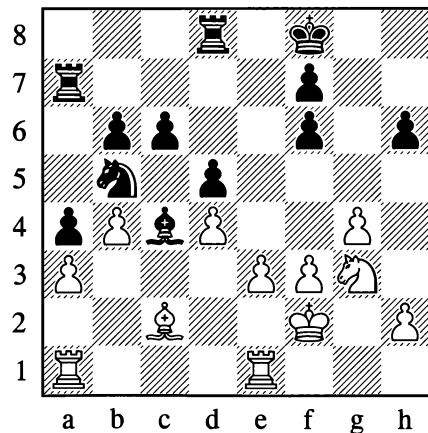
25.♙f5 h6 26.♘h5 ♔e7



27.g4!

White fixes the structure on the kingside, stabilizing his control over the f5- and h5-outposts. At the same time, the option opens for the h5-knight to retreat to g3, and then hop into f5 at an opportune moment.

27...b6 28.♗he1 ♖a7 29.♘g3 ♔f8 30.♙c2
Preparing ♘g3-f5.

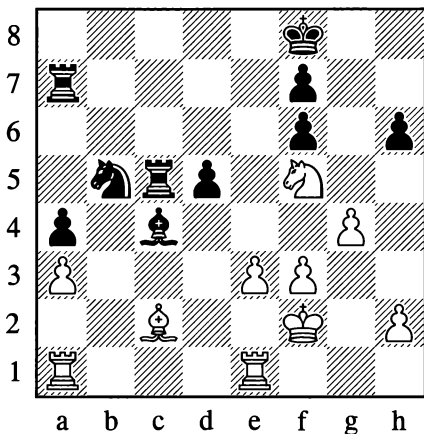


30...c5?

Being under pressure, Black cannot tolerate his passive position and decides to do something. However, it just makes White's task easier.

He should have followed a wait-and-see policy with 30...♘d6.

31.bxc5 bxc5 32.dxc5 ♖c8 33.♘f5 ♗xc5



34.♗eb1!

Now the weakness of the a4-pawn decides.

34...♗c8 35.♗b4 d4 36.exd4 ♗e6 37.♗xa4

White is completely winning. He is two pawns up, and Black does not have enough compensation. Magnus cleanly converted his advantage into a full point.

...1-0

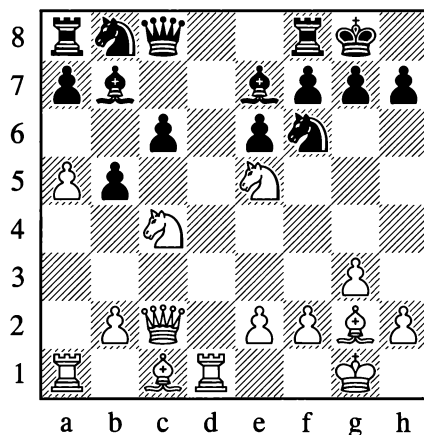
The concept used in this game by Carlsen is top-notch and shows the tremendous understanding he had already at a young age. It is not easy to understand that the c4-bishop is useless. It looks active and stable. Upon closer inspection, Magnus realized that Black's nice-looking set-up on the queenside with the bishop on c4 and the knight on b5 leads nowhere after we simply protect the a3-pawn. On the contrary, White has plenty of useful moves on the kingside, improving the situation continuously, based on the destroyed nature of the Black structure. In that mission, the white light-squared bishop proves very useful, while the black minor pieces are stuck in disagreement about who should be placed on the only good available square on c4. That was a truly magnificent display of positional understanding!

If the saying we already mentioned by Siegbert Tarrasch ("If one piece is bad, the whole position is bad") is true, then it makes sense that whole games can be played around this very concept. One player trying to activate or exchange his bad piece and one player trying to stop that.

M. Vachier-Lagrave – Mykhaylo Oleksiyenko

Germany 2021

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 e6 4.0-0 ♗e7 5.c4 0-0 6.d4 c6 7.♗c2 dxc4 8.a4 b6 9.♘bd2 ♗b7 10.♘e5!? ♗xd4 11.♘dxc4 ♗d8 12.♗d1 ♗c8 13.a5 b5



White has already sacrificed a pawn, trying to seize the initiative. Black's main problem is his bishop on b7, and if he manages to free it by playing ...c6-c5, he will obtain a winning position.

14.a6!

The only move. Although Vachier-Lagrave is forced to sacrifice the second pawn, the opponent's queenside weaknesses give him an excellent initiative.

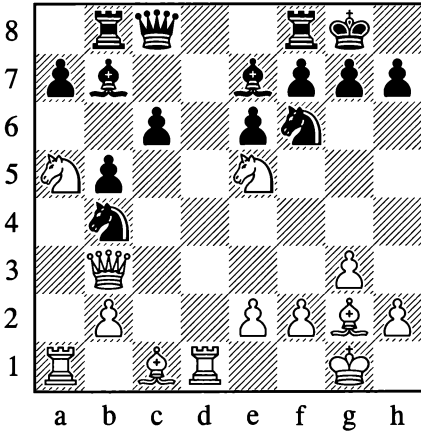
After 14.♘d2 c5, White would not have any compensation for the pawn.

14...♖xa6 15.♖a5

The knight is superbly placed here, putting pressure on Black's b7-bishop and the c6-pawn.

15...♖b4 16.♖b3 ♖b8

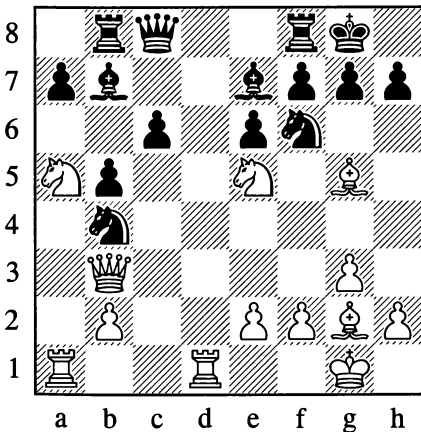
16...♖bd5 17.e4 ♖b6 18.♗f4 would leave White with enough compensation for the material deficit.



17.♗g5

White pins the f6-knight and prepares to jump in with ♖e5-d7.

Bringing the bishop to the battle with tempo would be even stronger: 17.♗d2! ♖bd5 18.♖ac1 c5 19.e4 ♖b6 20.♖xb5 and White is much better due to the activity of his pieces.

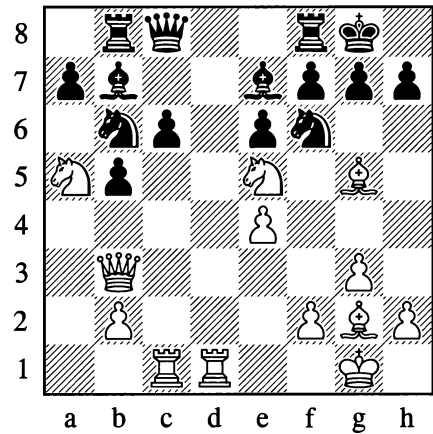


17...♖bd5?!

An important moment.

Black misses a good chance to activate all his pieces: 17...♗a8!! 18.♖d7 c5! Exchanging the worst piece even at the cost of an exchange sacrifice. 19.♗xa8 ♖xa8 20.♖xf8 ♖xf8 The position is unclear, but this looks like paradise for Black compared to what happened in the game. Oleksiyenko should have been ready to part with some material if it meant exchanging his miserable light-squared bishop. He won't get a second chance.

18.e4 ♖b6 19.♖ac1



All of White's forces are mobilized.

19...c5 20.♖xb5

White's pieces are more active than their counterparts. Now White's threat is ♖ec6.

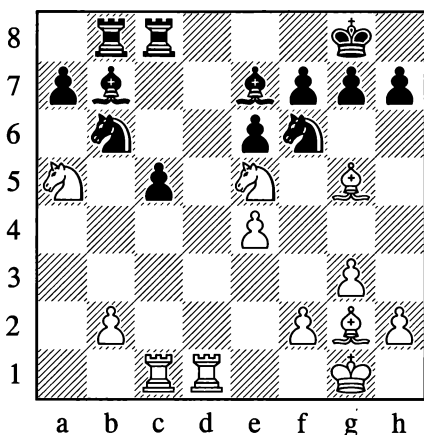
20...♗a6 21.♖c6

21.♖ec6! ♖xb5 22.♖xe7+ ♖h8 23.♖xc8 was stronger. Play could continue 23...♖bxc8 24.♖b7 ♗a4 25.♖e1 c4 26.♗e3 and White has more than sufficient compensation for the pawn. Black's pawns on a7 and c4 are weak, White has the bishop pair, and his pawn on e4 restricts the opponent's knights.

21...♙b7?

After this move, Black is lost. The bishop hanging on b7 will inevitably decide the game.

21...♞e8! would be correct, with an unclear game.

22.♞xc8 ♜fxc8**23.♙f4!**

Eying the b8-rook, which is unable to move due to the hanging b7-bishop.

23...♙f8?

This mistake makes White's task even easier.

23...♙a8 would be better, although after 24.f3 ♞e8 25.♙ec6 ♞bc8 26.♙xe7+ ♞xe7 27.♙f1, White still would have a decisive advantage.

But not 23...♙xe4?!, due to 24.♙xe4 ♙xe4 25.♙ec6, when White would be winning.

24.♙d3 ♙xe4 25.♙xb8 ♞xb8 26.♙xc5 ♙xg2 27.♙a6 ♞a8 28.♙xg2

White is completely winning and eventually converted his advantage to a full point.

...1-0

The whole game revolved around one thing: is the black light-squared bishop going to be activated, or not? Black tried with all his might to exchange his terrible bishop, but he missed one crucial chance (17...♙a8!!), and then it was all over quickly.

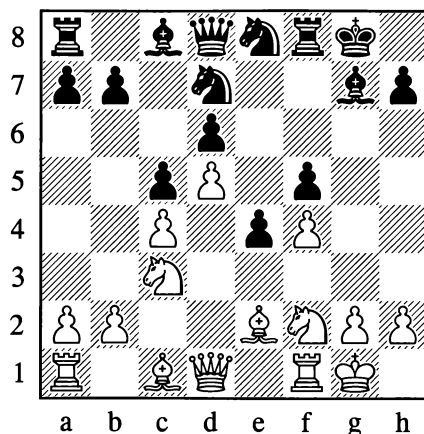
No Prejudice

When pondering an exchange, it is important to pay attention to detail, without being prejudiced. Knowing the typical ideas should not stop us from considering atypical moves in cases where they make sense. One scenario where this type of "prejudice" often surfaces, is cases of exchanging a fianchettoed bishop for an opponent knight. You will find that most players playing the Dragon, King's Indian, Catalan and all other openings where a bishop gets fianchettoed early, are prone to missing chances of using that bishop to take another piece along the long diagonal. Granted, that bishop is powerful, but one should cherish its power, not hoard it.

Vincent Keymer – Magnus Carlsen

Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden 2019

1.d4 ♙f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 g6 4.♙c3 d6 5.e4 ♙g7 6.♙f3 0-0 7.♙e2 e5 8.0-0 ♙e8 9.♙e1 f5 10.exf5 gxf5 11.f4 ♙d7 12.♙d3 e4 13.♙f2



13...♙xc3!?

An interesting decision. Carlsen gives up his beautiful bishop for the white knight to saddle his opponent with doubled c-pawns. Black intends to attack the opponent's king via the g-file, and by doubling the white c-pawns, the possibility of White's counterattack with b2-b4 is neutralized. Note that thanks to the fixed pawns on c3 and f4, White is unable to activate his dark-squared bishop and attack the black king.

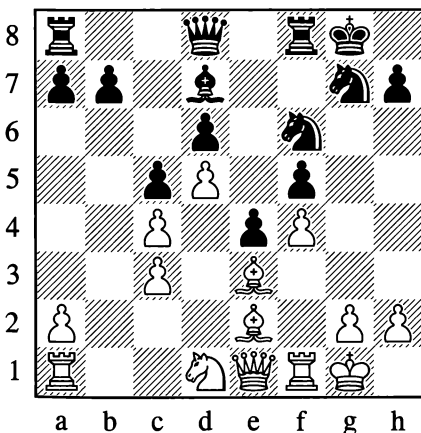
13...a6 with the idea of ...♙d4, would also be strong.

14.bxc3 ♖df6

14...♜f7 or 14...♞h8, to launch a direct attack on the g-file, would be more accurate.

15.♙e3?!

A strong defensive resource for White is: 15.♞e1! A typical manoeuvre. White clears the d1-square for the knight, to transfer it to e3, and blockade the black passed pawn on e4. 15...♜g7 16.♜d1 ♙d7 17.♜e3 White's bishop pair and the possibility of the h2-h3 and g2-g4 plan, give him a slight advantage.

15...♜g7 16.♞e1 ♙d7 17.♜d1**17...♙a4!**

Carlsen activates his light-squared bishop, that was restricted by the f5-pawn.

18.h3

18.♜b2 ♙e8 is an improved version of 17...♙e8, as now Black has driven the white knight one tempo further away from its ideal post on e3. 19.♙f2 ♙h5 with an unclear position.

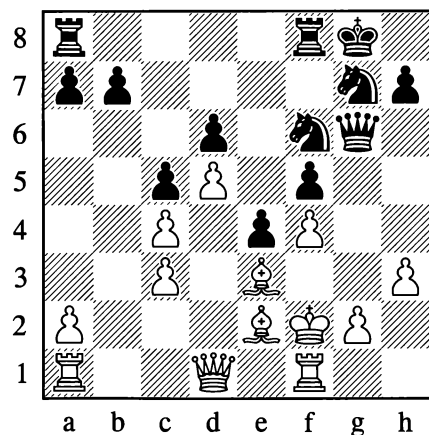
18...♙xd1!?

With this interesting exchange, Carlsen prevents the opponent's knight from joining the attack. It looks weird to take a knight that sits seemingly passive on the first rank, but if we imagined this knight's future when he would be safely sitting on e3, preparing g2-g4, it makes sense to assess it as a better piece than the a4-bishop.

18...♞h8 is also logical.

19.♞xd1 ♞e8 20.♞f2

20.♞b1 b6 21.♞h2 ♞g6 22.♞e1 ♞h8 23.♞h4 with a slight advantage for White.

20...♞g6**21.♞g1**

Not the most precise.

Correct would be 21.g4! ♞h6 22.♞h1, and White starts to develop some initiative.

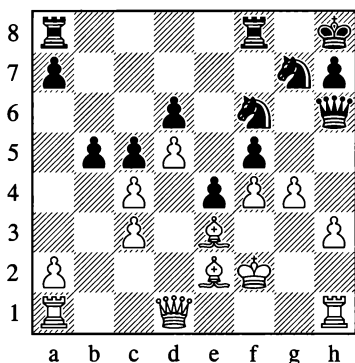
21...♙h8 22.a4

White is trying to stop Black from ever getting counterplay with ...b7-b5.

Another option would be to go for it immediately:

22.g4 ♖h6 23.♙h1 b5!

Undermining the defence of the d5-pawn.



Black is seizing the initiative, and now White has two options:

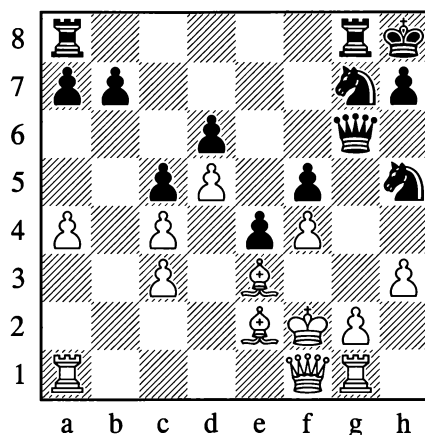
a) 24.cxb5? would help Black to gain an advantage by tactical means. 24...♖h4† 25.♙g2 ♜gh5! 26.♖e1 (26.gxh5 ♜g8† 27.♙f1 ♖g3 The white king cannot live through this attack.) 26...♖xe1 27.♙axe1 ♜xd5 28.gxh5 ♜xe3† 29.♙f2 ♜d5 Black would win a pawn.

b) Therefore, it would be more prudent to go for 24.♖d2, after which 24...bxc4 25.♙ag1 ♖h4† 26.♙g2 ♙ab8 leads to a complicated battle.

22...♙g8 23.♖f1 ♜fh5?!

Magnus tries to prevent White from playing g2-g4 by tactical means.

23...h5 would be correct.

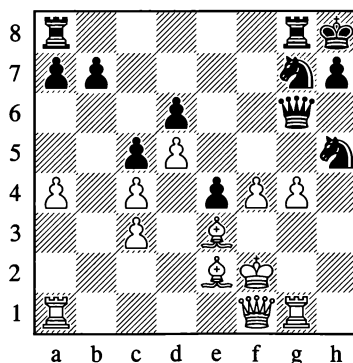
**24.g3!**

Playing g2-g4 is not a must! White can hold on to his position and try to slowly build up the attack.

24.g4

This would give Black the chance for some tactics:

24...fxg4 25.hxg4

**25...♜xf4!**

The point.

26.♙xf4 ♙af8 27.♙e3 ♖f6

Threatening both ...♖xc3† and ...♜h5.

28.♜d2

After 28.♙c1, then ♜h5!, stretches White's defences even further.

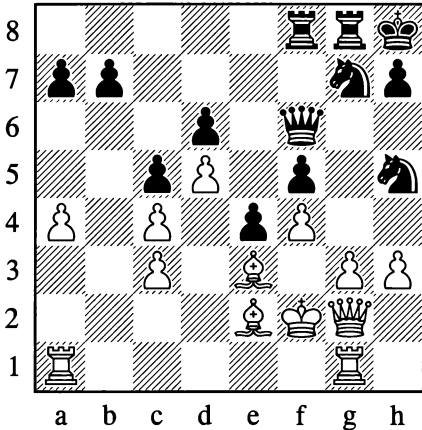
28...♖xf4† 29.♖xf4 ♙xf4 30.♙e3 ♙f6

Chances would be approximately equal.

24...♖af8 25.♜g2

25.♜g2 would be better: 25...♜f6 26.♖c1 with a slight advantage for White.

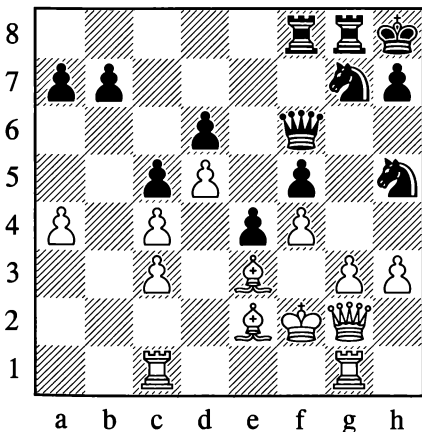
25...♜f6



26.♖ac1

An unnecessary defensive move. Opening the a1-h8 diagonal would be in White's favour.

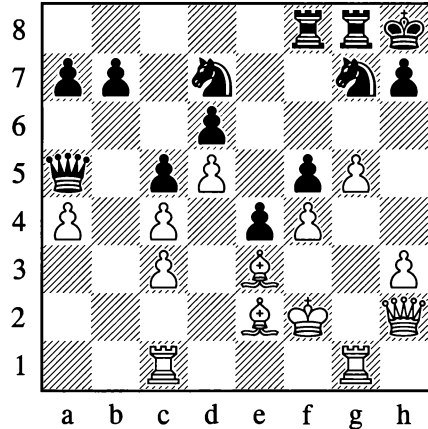
It would be better to go for: 26.♜f1!? A tricky move. Now if Black was tempted to take a pawn: 26...♜xc3? is a mistake. (26...♜h6 keeps the position complicated.) 27.♖b1 b6 28.♜d1 ♘f6 29.♖b3 ♜a5 30.♜a1 The a1-h8 diagonal would be opened in White's favour. 30...h6 31.g4 and White's initiative would be decisive.



26...♜d8?!

Missing a strong tactical shot. 26...♘xg3!! initiates a long forcing line: 27.♜xg3 ♘h5 28.♜h2 ♜h4† 29.♘f1 ♖xg1† 30.♘xg1 ♖g8† 31.♘f1 ♖g3 32.♙f2 ♖xh3 33.♙xh4 ♖xh2 34.♙xh5 ♖xh4 35.♙d1 ♖xf4† with an interesting and double-edged game.

27.♜h2 ♘f6 28.g4! ♘d7 29.g5 ♜a5



30.g6?

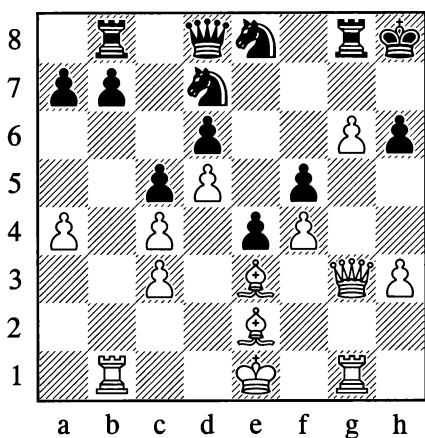
This move gives Black's position some breathing room. The f6-square is available for a knight, the h4-d8 diagonal is open for the queen, and the g8-rook doesn't stare into a brick wall on g5.

After 30.h4, White would seize a decisive initiative.

30...h6

30...♘f6! 31.gxh7 ♘xh7 32.h4 ♜xa4 33.♖a1 ♜d7 34.♖a7 ♘e8! with the idea of ...♘ef6, and then using the vital g4-outpost, would give Black a slight advantage.

31.♖b1 ♖b8 32.♜g3 ♜d8 33.♘e1 ♘e8



34.♔d2?

After this mistake, the tables are completely turned. Keymer should have protected the important g6-pawn.

34.h4 with the idea of h4-h5 should have been played.

34...♖f8 35.♗f2 ♔e7 36.♔e3 ♖f6 37.♔d2
♖xg6

Now Black has a significant advantage, and Magnus went on to win.

...0-1

What a double-edged battle! Both decisions by Carlsen to part with his bishops were not at all obvious. However, after examining the position carefully, both made sense. It was not easy to be punished for the absence of each bishop on their respective colour complexes, and Black's knights always had some prospects. Both decisions required a mind free of prejudice.

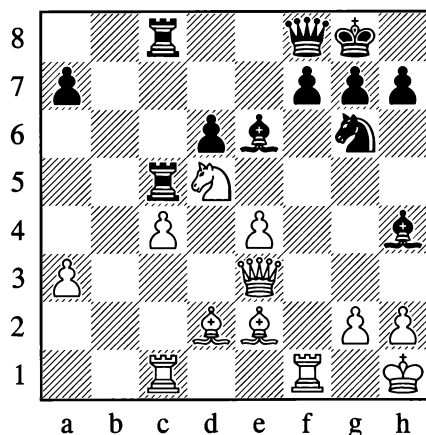
The above game also serves as an opportunity for a reminder: what remains is important! This principle is highly relevant when evaluating whether to swap off a fianchettoed bishop or other cherished pieces.

The Duel

In positions where your opponent has a bad piece, other opposing pieces may be able to veil this problem with their activity. In such positions, a good strategy could be exchanging those active pieces, and reaching a position where only one of your good pieces is left to fight against the opponent's bad piece. Your aim should be to let a duel occur between the two.

Fabiano Caruana – Anish Giri

Ekaterinburg 2021



Black has achieved a pleasant advantage due to his more active pieces and better pawn structure. A quick look at the position reveals that White's light-squared bishop is bad, being restricted by its own pawns.

25...h6!

According to the strategy mentioned above, Black seeks to exchange the opponent's dark-squared bishop, and then take the knight with ...♗xd5 to go into a situation with a good knight versus a bad bishop.

26.♖b3 ♗g5! 27.♗xg5 hxg5

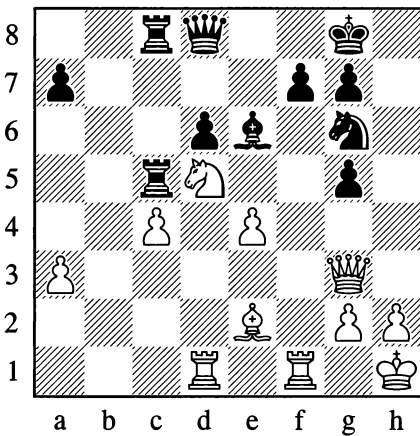
Anish Giri gives a highly instructive evaluation of the position: "The doubled

g-pawns are even nice. The pawn on g7 is guarding the king and the f6-square, while the g5-pawn is protecting the f4-square and can be pushed forward without compromising the king's safety."

28. ♖g3 ♜d8

The immediate 28...♙xd5 was also correct, taking the strong knight before it can run away.

29. ♝cd1



29... ♙xd5!

Giri continues his correct strategy and prepares to enter the "duel".

30. exd5 ♘f4!

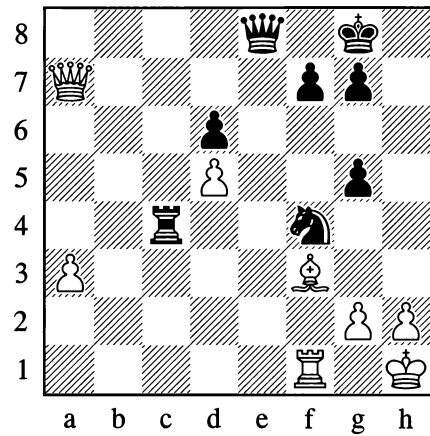
Now the white c4-pawn is the target.

31. ♜f2 ♝8c7!

Paying attention to the opponent's possibilities is very important. Anatoly Karpov's games are highly recommended to develop your prophylactic thinking!

31...♘xe2? would be premature because after 32. ♜xf7+ ♔h8 33. ♜h5+ ♔g8 34. ♜f7+, White would force a draw by perpetual check.

32. ♝d4 ♜e8 33. ♙f3 ♝xc4!? 34. ♝xc4 ♝xc4 35. ♜xa7

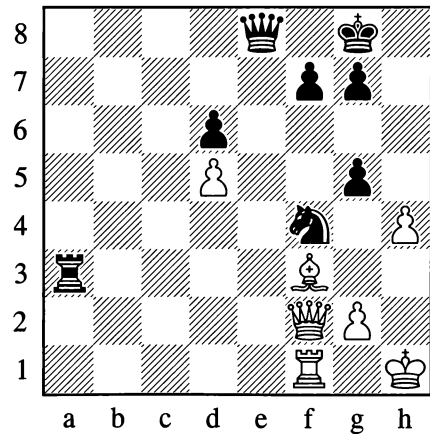


35... ♝a4 36. ♜f2?

A mistake in a bad position.

36. ♜c7 would be better, although after 36...♝xa3 37. h4 (37. ♜xd6?? ♝xf3! 38. gxf3 ♜e2 wins instantly) 37...♘g6 38. hxg5 ♝a4 Black would still have a huge advantage.

36... ♝xa3 37. h4



37... ♜e5!

Centralizing the queen.

38. hxg5 ♜xg5

Black is completely winning.

39.♖e1 ♜a8!

The black rook has finished its mission, and now it is coming back for defence. White has no compensation for the pawn deficit.

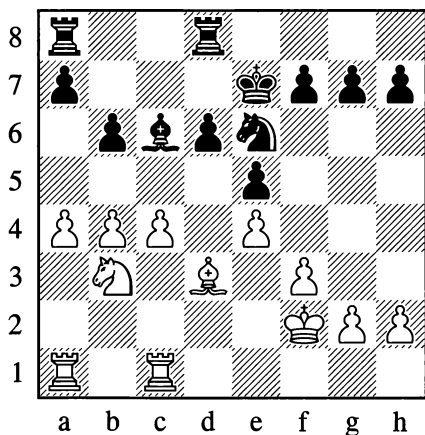
**40.♙e4 ♜a2!? 41.♜b1 ♜a8 42.♜e1 f5 43.♙b1
♜f7 44.♜e3 ♜h8† 45.♜g1 ♜xg2
0–1**

When the position was full of pieces it wasn't easy to foresee that Black would win the game simply because the white light-squared bishop was bad. All of White's other pieces were concealing that problem with their own activity. After most of them got exchanged, the disparity in power between Black's knight and White's bishop became the telling factor. That's what the "duel" is all about.

The "duel" does not occur specifically between a good knight and a bad bishop. It can arise in many different forms.

Davor Palo – Magnus Carlsen

Gausdal 2004



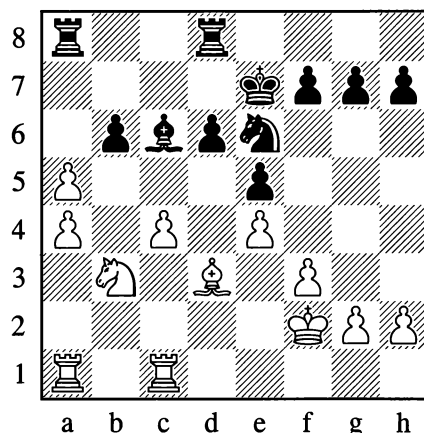
The white bishop is obviously bad, as it is restricted by its own pawns. Carlsen finds a way to exchange the knights and enter an endgame with good bishop versus bad bishop.

22...a5!

Carlsen creates an outpost on the c5-square for his knight.

23.bxa5?!

23.b5 would be a better move, although after 23...♙d7 24.♜d1, Black would still have an advantage due to the c5-outpost, White's weak c4-pawn and the bad bishop on d3.

**23...♜c5!**

A very strong intermediate move that may have been overlooked by Palo.

If 23...bxa5, then 24.c5! would give White a high chance of survival.

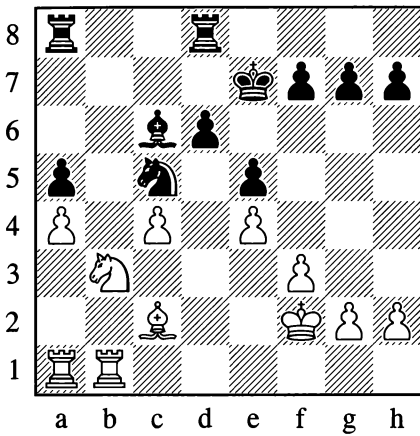
24.♙c2

After 24.♜xc5 dxc5 25.♜e3 bxa5, White's many weaknesses can be clearly felt, and Black's advantage is undeniable.

24...bxa5

Black has a mighty knight on c5, and sooner or later White will be forced to exchange it.

25.♜cb1



25...♔d7!

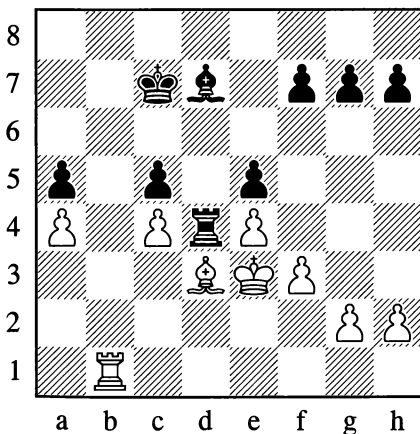
Threatening to win a pawn with ...♗xa4.

The immediate 25...♗xa4? was premature: 26.♗d4! exd4 27.♕xa4 ♕xa4 28.♖xa4 and White would achieve equality.

26.♗xc5† dxc5

In addition to the weakness of White's pawns on a4 and c4, the b4- and d4-squares now also become outposts for the black rooks.

27.♖d1† ♕c7 28.♖xd8 ♖xd8 29.♕e3 ♖d4 30.♗d3 ♗d7 31.♖b1



31...f5!

Carlsen uses tactical means to make further positional gains. As the f-pawn is currently

untouchable, it manages to appear on f4, gaining space.

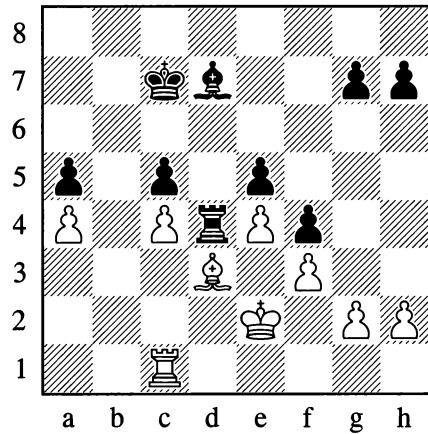
32.♖c1

32.exf5?? would of course lose immediately to 32...♖xd3† 33.♗xd3 ♗xf5†.

32...f4†

Putting another pawn on a dark square and gaining space.

33.♕e2



33...♖d6!

The rook is now able to swiftly move from one side of the board to the other through the sixth rank. Carlsen handles the endgame well, and wins the game with his characteristic, excellent technique.

34.♖b1 ♖h6

Provoking even more weaknesses.

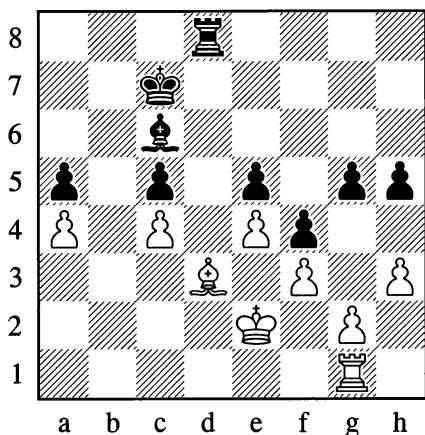
35.h3 ♖g6 36.♕f2 ♖d6 37.♕e2 g5 38.♗c2 h5

Gaining as much space as possible.

39.♖d1 ♖d4 40.♗d3

After 40.♖xd4? cxd4, Black would be winning because his king would easily penetrate the opponent's camp via the c5-square.

40...♖d6 41.♙c2 ♖d4 42.♙d3 ♙c6 43.♞g1
♞d8

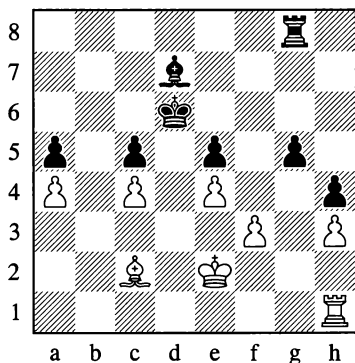


44.g3?

White finally can't stand the pressure and decides to do something. However, this makes Black's task easier.

44...♞g8

44...fxg3! would be even stronger: 45.♞xg3
♞g8 46.♙c2 h4 47.♞g1 ♙d7 48.♞h1 ♔d6



The black king goes to defend the g5-pawn, freeing the rook to go to the open b-file. Black is completely winning.

45.gxf4 exf4 46.e5 ♙d7 47.♙h7 ♞g7 48.♙e4
♙xh3 49.♞h1 g4

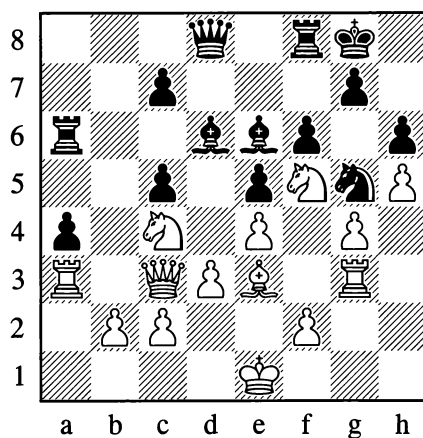
White has no compensation for the pawn deficit. Carlsen won after a few more moves.

...0-1

It's not always so simple to get into the "duel". Sometimes it can be a long process, spanning many moves, and then long-term planning is of the essence. In the following game, you will see how the Russian rising star Andrey Esipenko paralyzes his opponent with the right exchanges.

Andrey Esipenko – Aleksey Goganov

Moscow 2020



Black has a ruined pawn structure on the queenside, and his bishop on d6 is bad. By trying to exchange the opponent's other minor pieces, young Esipenko goes for a duel between a good knight and a bad bishop.

22.♙xg5!

Andrey does not miss the opportunity to exchange. Otherwise, the knight would run away to f7.

22...hxg5 23.♔e2

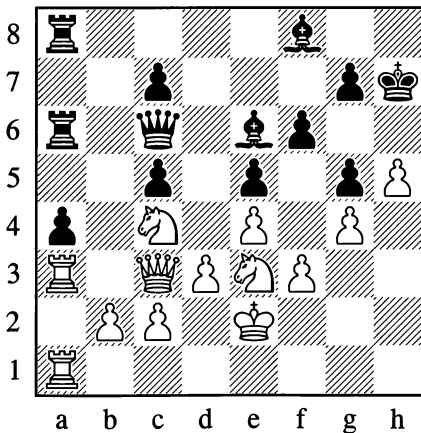
Clearing the first rank to transfer the g3-rook to the a-file.

Now is a good time to take stock: White's knight on c4 is much better than the black bishop on d6, but what about the other two minor pieces? With the f5-knight and the e6-bishop still on the board, we cannot claim that a duel is in session. However, Esipenko had probably already spotted the winning plan. After putting enough pressure on the a4-pawn, White will force Black to take on c4 and enter the duel. Let's see how the young star implements his plan.

23...♙d7 24.♖g1 ♜fa8 25.♖ga1 ♔f8 26.f3
♜c6 27.♘fe3

The knight jumps backwards from f5 to support its colleague on c4, while giving the queen more freedom to move around.

27...♔h7



28.♜e1!

A classical manoeuvre to set up "Alekhine's Gun" on the a-file.

28...♜b7 29.♔f2 ♔h8 30.♜a2 ♔d7
31.♘d5

The knight heads to c3 to attack the a4-pawn one more time.

31...♔e6 32.♘c3 ♜c6 33.♜a1

Alekhine's Gun.

33...♔xc4

Due to the power of the knight on c4, this exchange had to be made sooner or later.

The a4-pawn can no longer be held, as against 33...♔d7 White has 34.b3, winning the pawn.

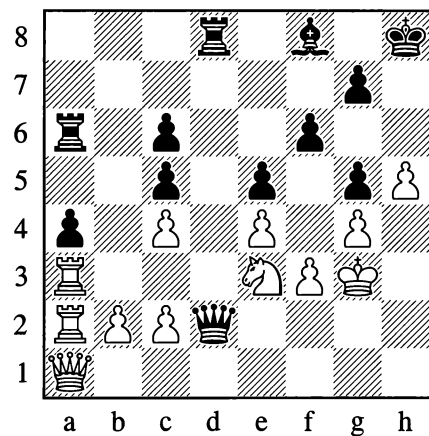
34.dxc4

White has achieved his goal of exchanging minor pieces, thus bringing about the duel of good knight versus bad bishop.

34...♜d7 35.♘d5

Provoking weaknesses. White is in no hurry to take the pawn.

35...c6 36.♘e3 ♜d2† 37.♔g3 ♜d8



The situation might look a little bit scary, but the white king is perfectly safe. It would be impossible for Black to have a strong attack, as he is playing without the f8-bishop. His activity is only temporary.

38.♜g1 ♜b4 39.♜c1 ♜a7 40.c3 ♜b8
41.♜xa4

White is winning. He is a pawn up, and there is no way for Black to activate his bishop. However, it took a while for White to squeeze the full point.

...1-0

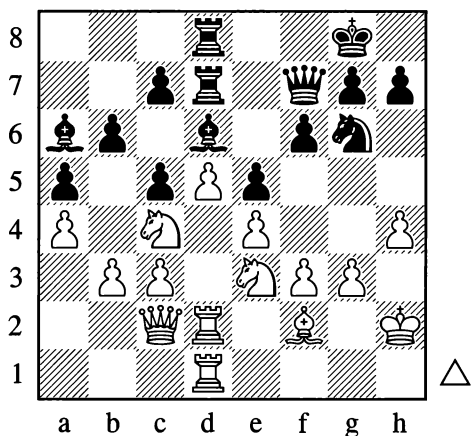
Breaking the Principle

Sometimes we see a strong player breaking the principle of the worst piece, and unexpectedly exchanging his good piece with the opponent's bad one. As you know, there are many elements playing a role in the evaluation of a position. All the factors and possibilities of a given position should be considered before making a decision.

We could, for example, take the opponent's bad bishop, in cases when his position is solid, and we need to achieve a pawn break. The bad bishop might have to go if we need to strike on its colour complex, and we cannot otherwise make progress.

Viswanathan Anand – Andreas Heimann

Germany 2021



32. ♖xd6!?

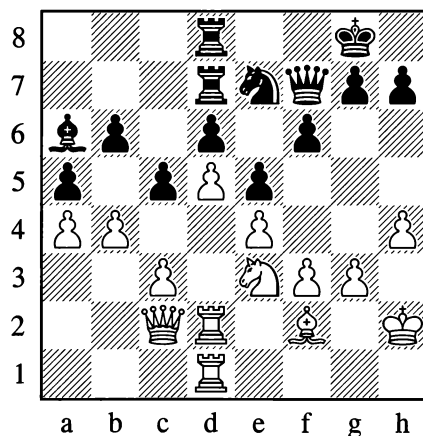
An interesting but tough decision by Anand. The black bishop on d6 is bad, but he exchanges it with his powerful knight, and repairs his opponent's pawn structure! What is the idea behind this exchange?

32...cxd6 33.b4!

The point! By exchanging the opponent's dark-squared bishop, Anand provided his position with the conditions to play b3-b4, and then he will disable the opponent's other bishop by playing b4-b5!

33... ♗e7

Taking the pawn doesn't solve Black's problems: 33...cxb4 34.cxb4 axb4 35. ♖b1 ♜c8 36. ♗d1 h5 37. ♖xb4 The weak pawn on b6, along with other weaknesses in Black's position like the f5-square, would give White a pleasant advantage.



34.g4

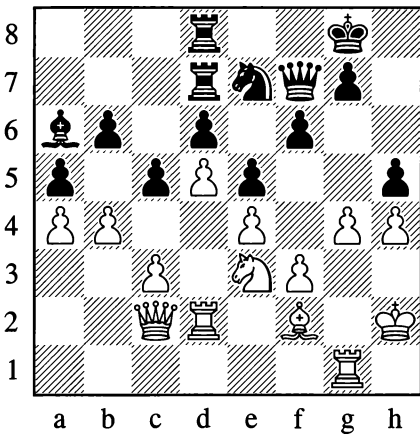
Playing against ...f6-f5.

34.b5! ♜c8 35.g4 would be a better move order.

34...h5 35. ♖g1?

A mistake that gives Black the possibility to create counterplay.

35.b5 ♜c8 36. ♖g1 would be the correct move order that would give White a good advantage. By blocking the queenside, White could have counted on the weaknesses of the opponent's queenside structure getting pressured by the knight soon landing on c4, in addition to his attack on the kingside.



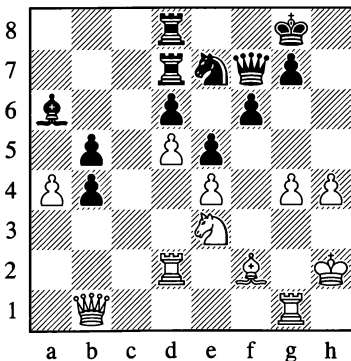
35...hxc4?

Returning the favour!

Black should have played:

35...cxb4! 36.cxb4 axb4 37.♖b1 hxc4 38.fxg4 b5!

Trying to get rid of all the queenside pawns.



39.♖xb4

39.a5 ♖g6 40.♖xb4 ♖c7 gives Black reasonable counterplay.

39...bxa4

By exchanging all his weak queenside pawns, Black can hope to hold his kingside weaknesses without being diverted elsewhere.

The game could continue:

40.h5 ♗c8 41.♖xa4 ♖h7 42.♖g3 ♖b7 43.♖d1 ♗g8

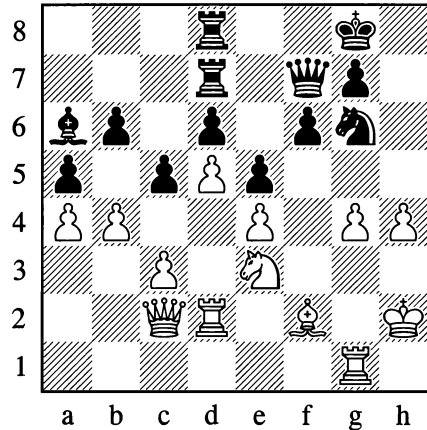
With a playable position.

36.fxg4

36.b5! again would be better.

36...♗g6

36...cxb4! 37.cxb4 axb4 would be correct.



37.b5!

By finally closing the queenside, Anand prepares for his final operation on the kingside.

37...♗c8 38.♗g3

A stronger plan would be:

38.♗c4! ♖b7 39.♗g3!

Using the king as the second defender of the f4-square and allowing the rooks to connect with the h-file.

39...♖d7

39...♗f4 40.♗e3 g5 41.♖h2 with a huge advantage for White.

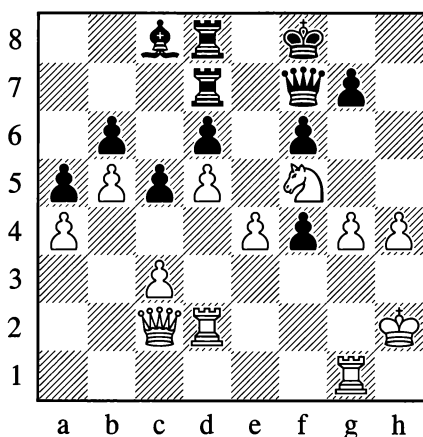
40.♖d1 ♖f8 41.♗e3 ♖d8 42.♖h2

White's active pieces and his initiative on the kingside would ensure his decisive advantage.

38...♗f4 39.♗f5!?

39.♖d1 was more accurate, and after 39...g5 40.♖f3 White has a large advantage.

39...♗f8 40.♗xf4 exf4



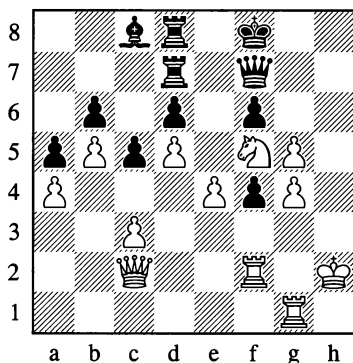
41.g5?!

A slight inaccuracy. A better chance was:

41.♞f2! g5

If 41...g6 42.♘h6 ♞g7 43.g5 fxg5 44.hxg5, the black king would be very weak.

42.hxg5



42...♞e8!

Preparing ...♞h7† and ...♙xf5 eliminating White's strong knight, while at the same time giving the queen access to the e-file and the important e5-square.

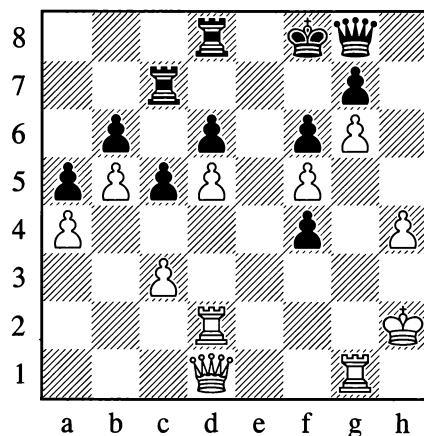
In the event of 42...fxg5 43.♞h1! ♞f6 44.♙g1 ♞f7 45.♞fh2 the black exposed king is completely helpless against the threats of the opponent's pieces.

43.♙g2 ♞h7 44.♞xf4 ♞e5 45.♞c1 ♙xf5

46.gxf5 fxg5 47.♞g4 ♞h2† 48.♙f1

White would retain an extra pawn, although since his king would also be exposed, converting the advantage would not be easy at all.

41...♞c7 42.g6 ♞g8 43.♞d1 ♙xf5 44.exf5

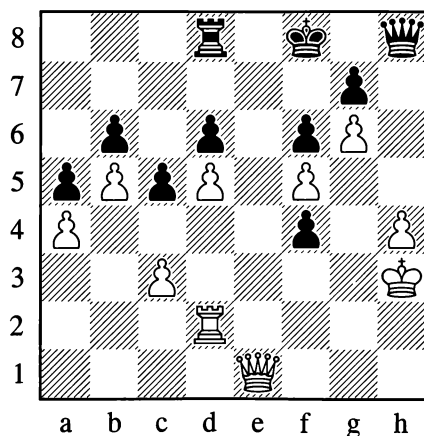


Black has solved most of his problems. Without the knight on f5, he can breathe a sigh of relief.

44...♞h8 45.♙h3 ♞e7 46.♞e1

Threatening ♞e1-e6.

46...♞xe1 47.♞xe1



47...♞e8??

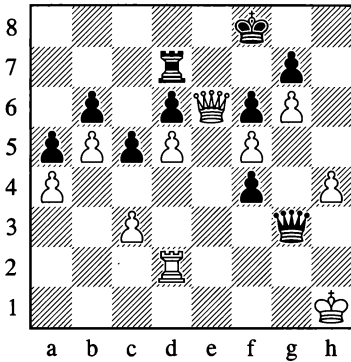
A fatal blunder.

Black could have achieved a draw by:

47...♖h5! 48.♗e6

48.♗e4? is met by 48...♞e8 49.♗xf4 ♞e5 and only Black could be better.

48...♗f3† 49.♕h2 ♗g3† 50.♕h1 ♞d7!



51.♞e2

51.♗xd7 ♗e1† and the d2-rook gets captured with check

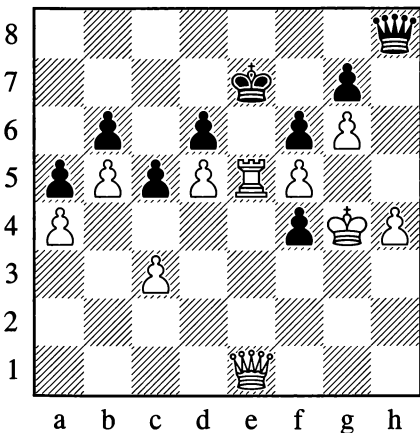
51...♗h3† 52.♕g1 ♗g3† 53.♕f1 ♗h3† 54.♕e1 ♗xc3†

With perpetual check.

48.♞e2 ♞e5

After 48...♞xe2 49.♗xe2 ♗g8 50.♗e4 Black's queen would be in a shameful position, and White would win easily.

49.♕g4 ♕e7 50.♞xe5†



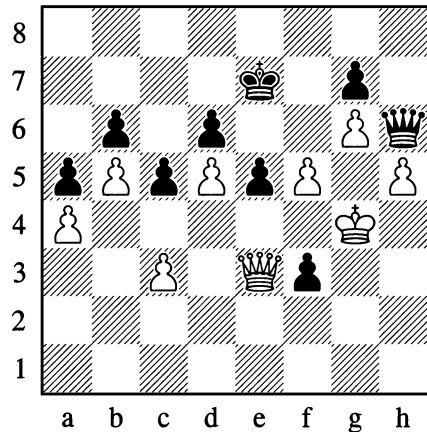
50...fxe5

If 50...dxe5, then 51.d6†! ♕xd6 52.♗e4, and the penetration of the white queen into Black's camp through the queenside would finish the game.

51.h5 f3

51...♗h6 52.♗h4† ♕d7 53.f6 wins for White.

52.♗e3 ♗h6



53.f6†!

This beautiful breakthrough is a worthy finish to Anand's powerful play. After 53...♕xf6 54.♗xf3† ♗f4† (or 54...♕e7 55.♗f7† ♕d8 56.♕f5! ♗xh5† 57.♕e6 and the game is over) 55.♗xf4† exf4 56.♕xf4 White wins. Therefore, Black resigned.

1-0

A nice win by the former World Champion. Everything started with his very interesting decision to take the "bad bishop" on d6. If he didn't take it, then how was he going to make progress? At first, it might seem preposterous, yet, upon closer inspection, one might discover that he was breaking one principle but following another: to make progress, you have to achieve a pawn break.

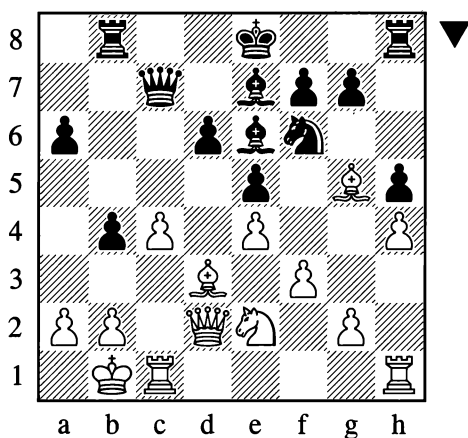
That's a very common theme among instances of strong players capturing a bad bishop, and we will have a chance to witness something similar again in the following example.

Timing

In this game, we will witness the French super-grandmaster both following and disobeying the principle! Everything in chess is about timing: an exchange which favours us on the present move might benefit the opponent on the next move.

Elshan Moradiabadi – M. Vachier-Lagrave

Krasnaya Polyana 2021



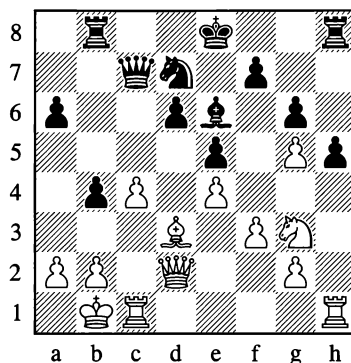
19...d7!

At first, Black follows the principle of the worst piece, and offers to exchange his bad bishop for the opponent's good one.

20.♙e3?!

A dubious but understandable reaction. Elshan is not interested in the exchange of dark-squared bishops, but it would have been better for him to choose one of the following two continuations:

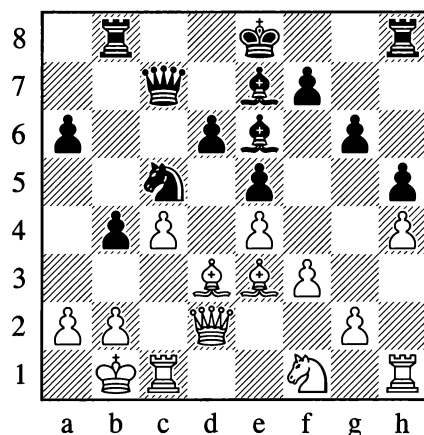
a) 20.♘g3 ♙xg5 21.hxg5 g6



22.♘f5! Making use of the bad bishop on d3.
22...♘c5 23.g4 with a very murky position.

b) 20.♙xe7 ♘xe7 21.♘g3 g6 with a complicated battle.

20...♘c5 21.♘g3 g6 22.♘f1



22...♘xd3!

As you can see, a world-class player knows when he can exchange his good piece with the opponent's bad one. By correctly evaluating the position, MVL realizes that after gaining the advantage of the two bishops and obtaining more space on the kingside, his position will be preferable. To do that, he needs to be able to push ...f7-f5.

23. ♖xd3 f5!

Striking on the light squares, which have just been weakened by the removal of the white bishop.

24. ♘d2?

A mistake that allows Black to increase his space advantage on the kingside.

24.g3 was necessary, to prevent Black's next move.

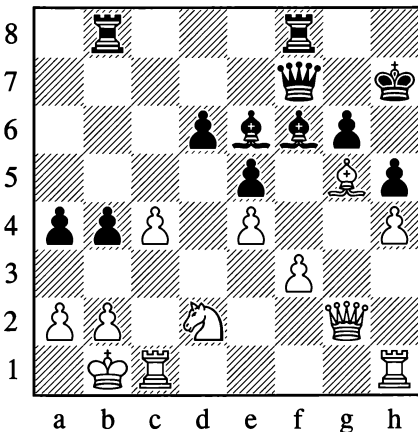
24...f4!

By blocking the kingside, Black can now safely castle and bring the h8-rook into action. After that, his attack on the queenside will be decisive.

25. ♖f2 a5 26.g3

White obviously cannot wait for the opponent's blows on the queenside and tries to open lines for himself.

26...fxg3 27. ♖xg3 0-0 28. ♖f2 a4 29. ♖e3 ♘h7 30. ♖e2 ♖f6 31. ♖g2 ♖f7 32. ♖g5

**32...♖g7!**

On move 19 Vachier-Lagrave offered to exchange the dark-squared bishops, and Moradiabadi wrongly refused the trade. Now the situation has reversed, and MVL correctly

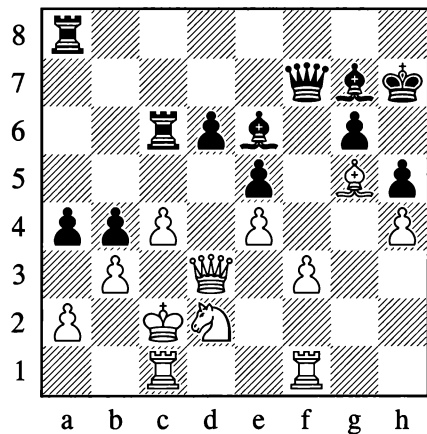
preserves the bishop in order to keep his king safe.

33. ♖e2 ♖fc8 34. ♖d3 ♖c6

A dual-purpose move, defending the d6-pawn and preparing to put more pressure on the c4-pawn by doubling the rooks. Black's plan is simple: provoke his opponent to weaken himself with b2-b3, then attack along the open a-file and/or open additional lines towards the white king.

35. ♖hf1 ♖bc8 36.b3 ♖a8

Now that White has committed his pawn to b3, the rook switches tracks.

37. ♖c2**37...d5!**

Maxime's style! Black opens lines against his opponent's king.

38.exd5 ♖xd5 39. ♖d1 ♖e6 40. ♘e4 axb3 41.axb3 ♖f5

Not the most accurate.

The best continuation was:

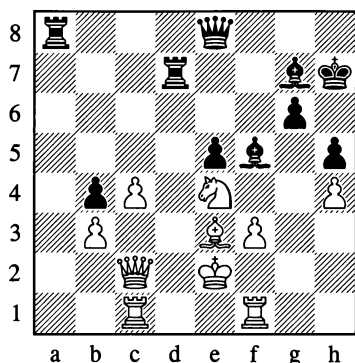
41...♖c7!

Threatening ...♖d7.

42. ♖d2

Defending against Black's threat and creating the threat of ♘g5†.

42...♖e8 43.♔e2 ♜d7 44.♖c2 ♙f5 45.♙e3



45...♙e4!

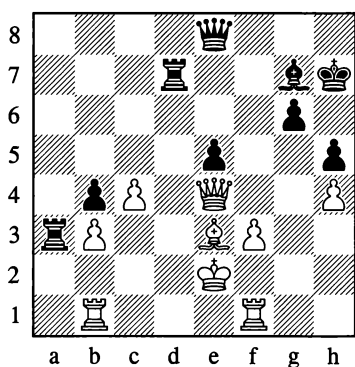
A powerful exchange at the right moment.

46.♖xe4

If 46.fxe4? ♖e6! White's exposed king would give Black a decisive advantage.

46...♞a3 47.♞b1

Another instructive line continues: 47.♖c2 e4! Activating the bishop. 48.fxe4 ♖a8! With the idea of ...♞a2 next. White would no longer be able to resist the opponent's threats.



47...♙h6!

The e3-bishop needs to be exchanged so that the d7-rook can get access to the d4-square.

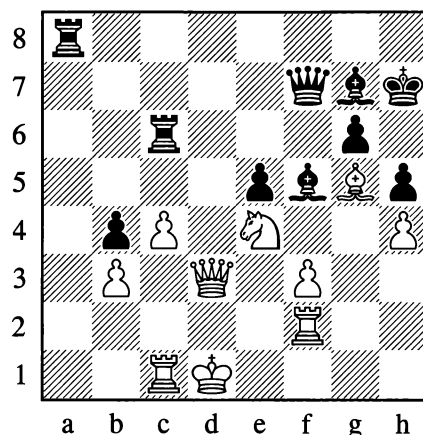
48.♙xh6 ♔xh6 49.♞b2 ♜d4 50.♖e3† ♔h7 51.♜d1 ♞xd1 52.♔xd1 ♞a1† 53.♔e2 ♖d8

Black would be clearly better due to his more active pieces and safer king.

42.♞f2?

A mistake.

42.♔e1 should have been played, getting off the d-file.



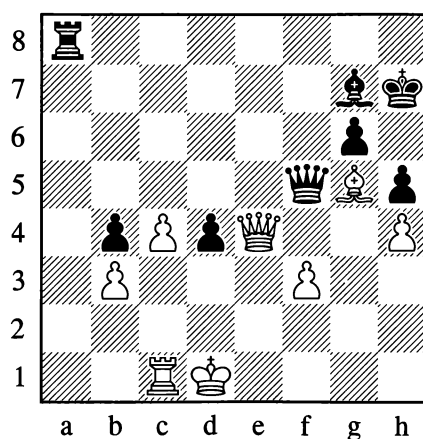
42...♞c7!

The rook gets ready to participate in the attack via d7.

43.♜d2 ♜d7 44.♖e3 ♜d4 45.♔d6 ♖f8

45...♞xd2† 46.♖xd2 ♖f8 also leads to a decisive advantage for Black.

46.♔xf5 ♖xf5 47.♞xd4 exd4 48.♖e4



48...♚f8?

This move significantly reduces the activity of the black queen and diminishes Black's advantage.

MVL should have preferred: 48...♚c8! Keeping the option of infiltrating the white camp through the h3-square. 49.c5 ♖a2 50.♙c2 (After 50.c6 ♚h3 the game would be over.) 50...♙a5 51.c6 ♙e5 52.♚d3 ♚h3 Black is winning.

49.c5!

Elshan takes advantage of the opportunity and gets counterplay by pushing his passed pawn.

49...♙e8 50.♚d3

Now the chances are balanced, and the game ended in a draw on move 69.

...½–½

On the first move of this example (19...♘d7!), Black proposed the exchange of dark-squared bishops, wanting to obtain control of the dark squares and play against the “bad” d3-bishop. We then saw two remarkable things. Firstly, White was actually wrong to avoid the exchange of those bishops. Secondly and quite astonishingly, Black was able to punish that decision by exchanging off the “bad” d3-bishop and adopting a whole new attacking strategy. Another instructive moment came later, after 32.♙g5, when White offered the same exchange of bishops but this time Black was right to avoid it. And yet, in the 41...♙c7! line in the notes to the game, we saw another key moment where Black actually needed to exchange the dark-squared bishops to progress his attack.

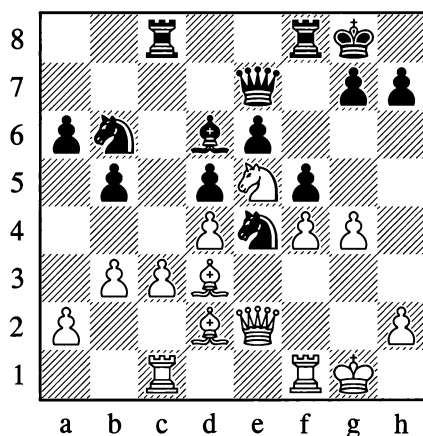
Everything is about timing. In chess, as in life, circumstances change. Choices that would have been good for us today could be

wrong tomorrow. Don't get fixated on one specific frame of mind: as a chess player, you need to be able to adapt.

An even more surprising example of correctly disobeying the usual principle can be seen in the following game.

Andrey Esipenko – Jorden van Foreest

Wijk aan Zee 2021

**22...♘xd2!**

A surprising exchange. Since White has weakened his kingside on the previous move by playing g2–g4, it is justified to exchange Black's strong knight for White's bad bishop. This needs to happen so that Black can later take on g4, and further underline the weaknesses created around the white king.

23.♚xd2 fxg4

A stronger continuation was:

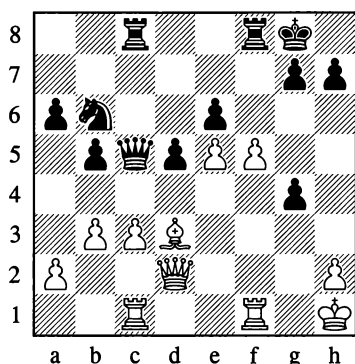
23...♙e5! 24.dxe5

After 24.fxg4 fxg4 White may struggle to demonstrate compensation for the pawn deficit.

24...fxg4 25.f5 ♚c5†

25...♘d7!? also looks interesting.

26.♙h1



26...d4!

Black wants to open the position even more, because of the vulnerable position of the white king.

27.fxe6

After 27.cxd4 ♖d5† 28.♗g2 ♜xc1 29.♞xc1 exf5 30.♗xd5† ♜xd5 Black's extra pawn should decide the game, because White's passed pawns in the centre are safely blockaded.

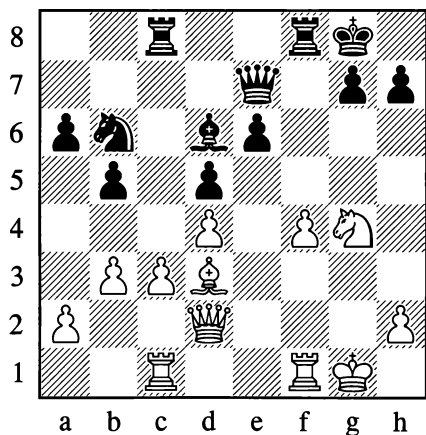
27...dxc3 28.♞xf8† ♗xf8 29.♞xc3 ♞d8

Keeping pieces on the board for the attack and pinning the d3-bishop.

30.♗e2 ♜d5 31.♗e4 g6

White's attack is parried, and Black has the upper hand.

24.♜xg4



24...♜h4

24...♜d7! was a slight improvement. Due to the weakness of the f4- and c3-pawns, as well as White's vulnerable king, Black would have the easier game.

25.♜e5 ♞c7 26.♗e3

Chances are equal and the game was eventually drawn.

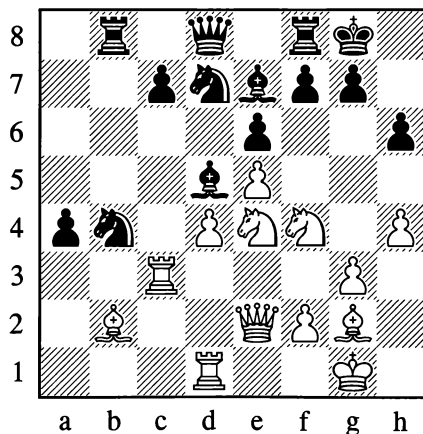
...1/2-1/2

This instance is different from what we saw in the previous two examples. Here Black did not take the d2-bishop to strike on the dark squares; he took it because tactically it was the only way for him to open the position. With the white pawn moving from g2 to g4, the status quo changed: it was no longer about having a strong knight on e4, but rather about opening up the white kingside.

This brings us to one of the most important harsh realities of our game. Sometimes, following general principles could be wrong, due to concrete calculation.

Hikaru Nakamura – Bilel Bellahcene

Khanty-Mansiysk 2019



This position is so complicated, that even the engine is unsure about the best move.

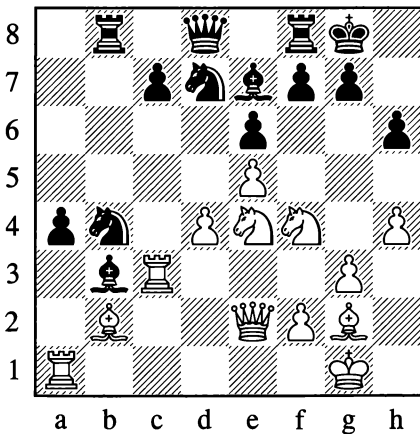
23...♙b3!?

Clearing the d5-square for the knight on b4, in order to exchange it for the strong white knight on f4, while at the same time putting the light-squared bishop on a protected square with tempo. This move is extremely logical.

24.♖a1!?

Missing a tactical opportunity.

Despite the logical factors in favour of Black's previous move, White could have countered it concretely with 24.♖xb3! axb3 25.♔g4, mounting a strong attack on the kingside. The position is extremely double-edged.



24...♘d5!

Now Black takes over.

25.♘xd5 exd5 26.♘d2 ♙b4

Black is clearly better, but the game eventually ended in a draw.

...½–½

Both players played logical moves, but they were far from perfect. Concrete calculation in chess almost renders generic remarks obsolete. That is the nature of our game. Logic, principles and plans will only get you so far. The correct, concrete implementation is where things get very tricky.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we saw the importance of the principle of the worst-placed piece, and how to take advantage of this principle both by activating our army and by hindering the activation of the opposing forces. We talked about a common scenario in chess, the “duel”, and we saw the extreme cases when we should go against the principle.

Knowing which pieces to exchange and how to do that is a complicated process, but we hope we laid out the basics here. If you're going to keep just one thing from this chapter, it should certainly be this:

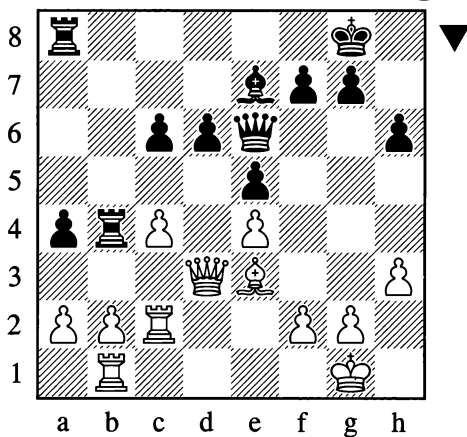
Always look for your worst-placed piece. You need to activate or exchange it.

Exercises

Andrey Esipenko – Radoslaw Wojtaszek

Struga 2021

1-1

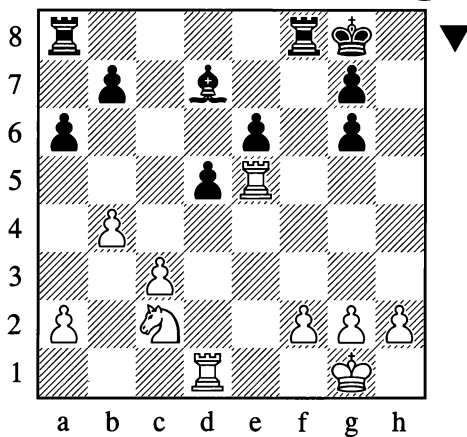


Black to play

Fabiano Caruana – Ian Nepomniachtchi

Internet (rapid) 2021

1-3

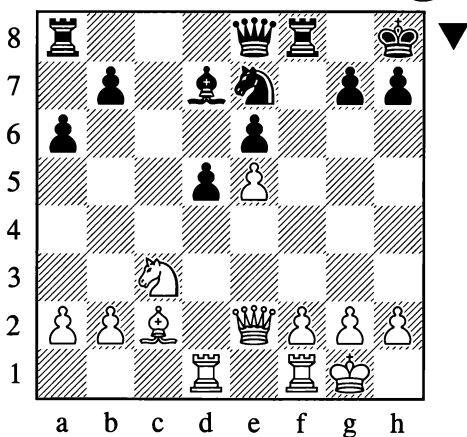


Black to play

Nodirbek Abdusattorov – Mikhail Mchedlishvili

Sharjah 2022

1-2

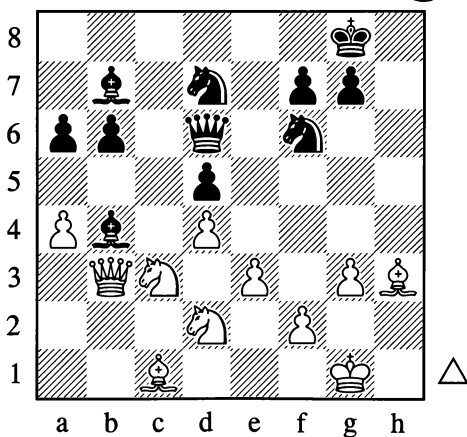


Black to play

Andrey Esipenko – Anish Giri

Wijk aan Zee 2021

1-4

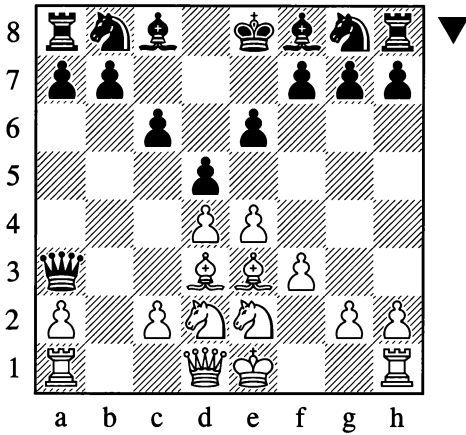


White to play

Nikola Mitkov – Alexey Dreev

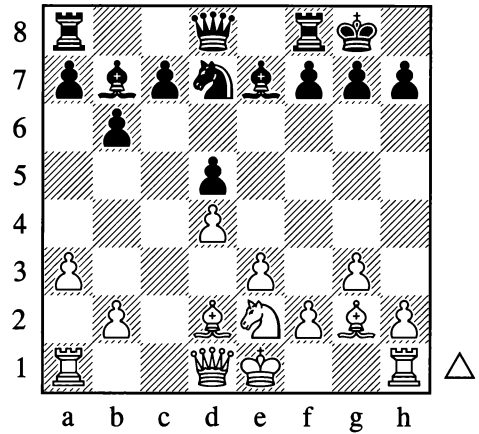
Neum 2000

1-5

**Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand**

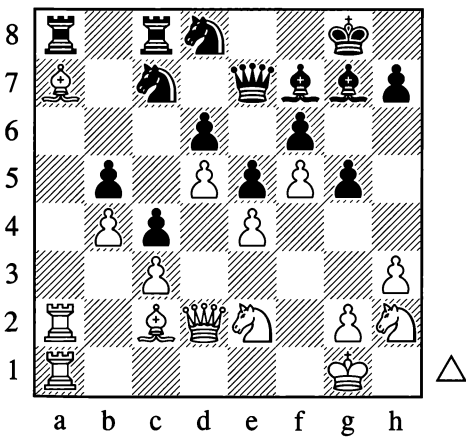
Moscow 2013

1-7

**Anatoly Karpov – Wolfgang Unzicker**

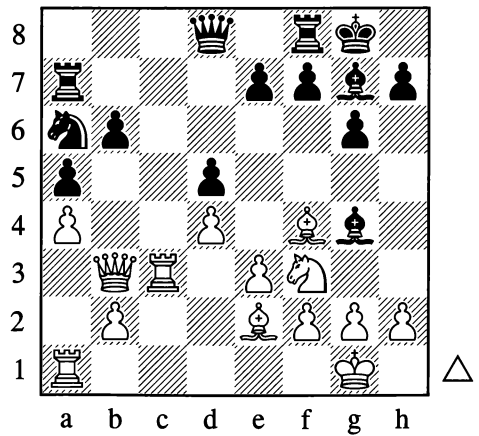
Nice (Olympiad) 1974

1-6

**Magnus Carlsen – Evgenij Agrest**

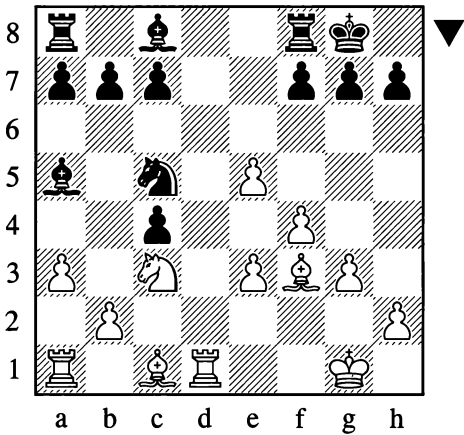
Copenhagen 2004

1-8



Nicolai Vesterbaek Pedersen – Magnus Carlsen

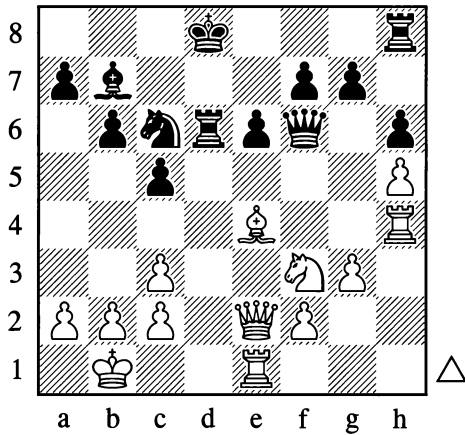
Aalborg (blindfold) 2006 1-9



Black to play

Parham Maghsoodloo – Ahmed Adly

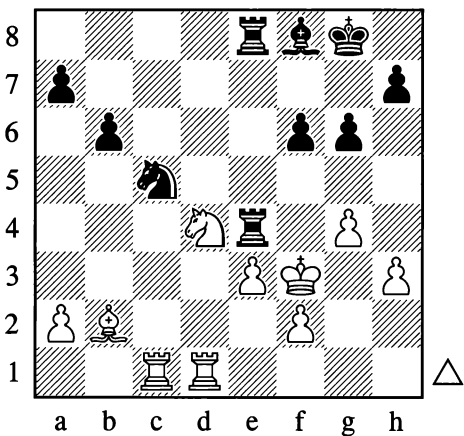
Sharjah 2021 1-11



White to play

Magnus Carlsen – Pavel Eljanov

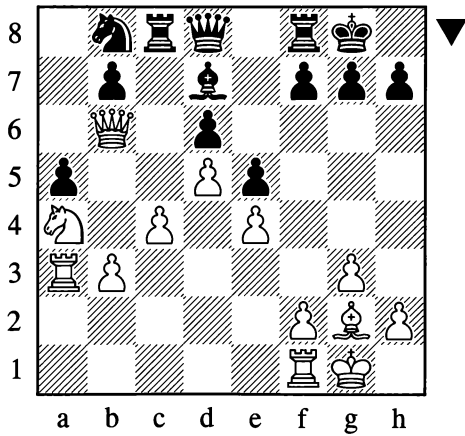
Wijk aan Zee 2008 1-10



White to play

Francois Marchand – Amir Bagheri

Nantes 2005 1-12

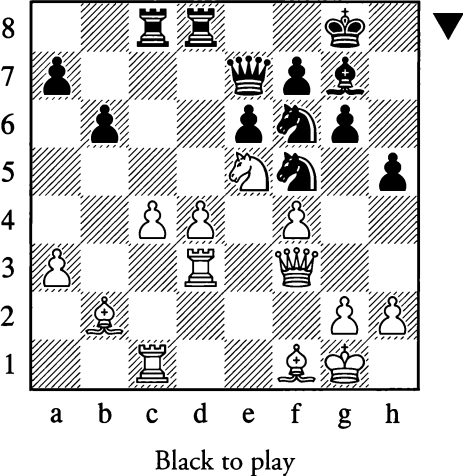


Black to play

Oliver Dimakiling – Parham Maghsoodloo

Sharjah 2021

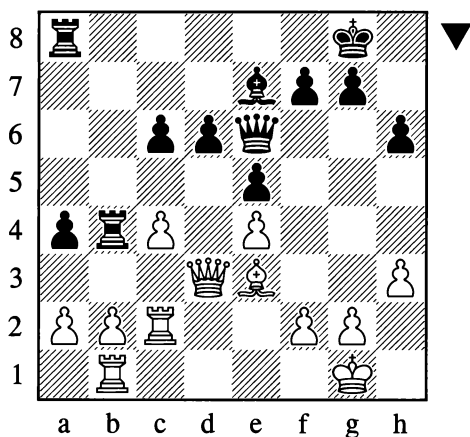
1-13



Solutions

1-1. Andrey Esipenko – Radoslaw Wojtaszek

Struga 2021



22...♙g5!

Wojtaszek correctly exchanges his bad bishop and gains equality.

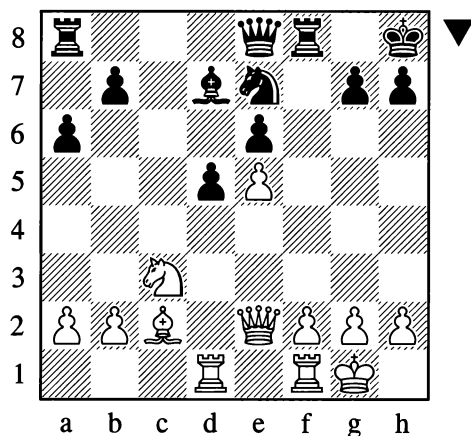
23.♙xg5 hxg5

Black has doubled pawns on the kingside, but it doesn't matter, as they can't be exploited. The weakness of the d6-pawn is compensated by the weakness of the b2-pawn. Everything got quickly swept off the board.

24.♞d1 ♞ab8 25.♞xd6 ♞xd6 26.♞xd6 ♞xb2
27.♞xb2 ♞xb2 28.♞xc6 ♞xa2 29.♞c8† ♔h7
30.♞a8 a3 31.c5 ♞c2 32.♞xa3 ♞xc5
½-½

1-2. Nodirbek Abdusattorov – Mikhail Mchedlishvili

Sharjah 2022



22...♙b5!

Black gets rid of his bad bishop.

23.♘xb5

23.♙d3 ♙xd3 24.♞xd3 ♞c8 Black has no problems

23...♞xb5 24.♙d3

If 24.♞xb5 axb5 25.a3 then 25...b4!, activating the a8-rook, and after 26.axb4 ♞a2 27.♞b1 ♘c6 Black gains equality.

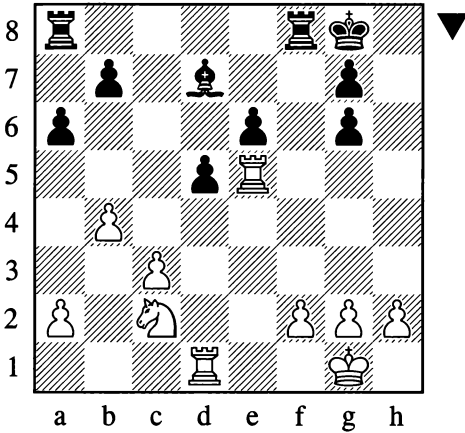
24...♞b6 25.g3 ♞f7 26.♔g2 ♞af8

All of Black's pieces are mobilized and chances are equal.

...½-½

1-3. Fabiano Caruana – Ian Nepomniachtchi

Internet (rapid) 2021



21...♙a4!

Simple and strong. Black gets rid of his worst piece.

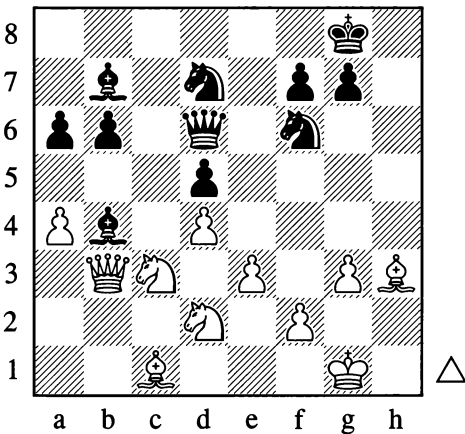
22.♞d2 ♜xc2 23.♞xc2 ♔f7

With equality.

...½–½

1-4. Andrey Esipenko – Anish Giri

Wijk aan Zee 2021



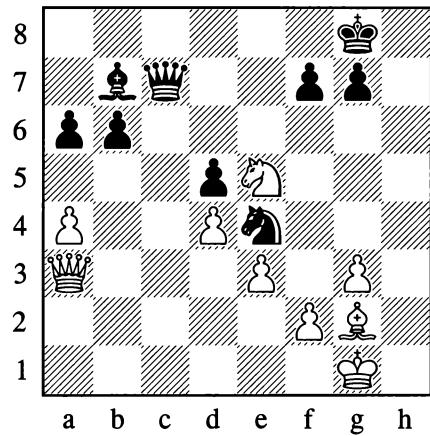
28.♞db1!

A strong retreat. By playing this preparatory move, White intends to solve the problem of his worst piece.

28...♞f8 29.♜a3

Trading off the passive c1-bishop.

29...♜xa3 30.♞xa3 ♞c7 31.♞d2 ♞h7
32.♜g2 ♞g5 33.♞f3 ♞ge4 34.♞xe4 ♞xe4
35.♞e5



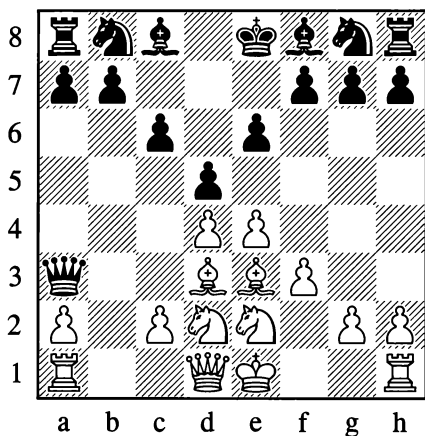
Indeed, Black's bishop is not active, but his queenside pawn majority and active e4-knight balance out the passivity of the bishop. Chances are equal.

...½–½

1-5. Nikola Mitkov – Alexey Dreev

Neum 2000

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3 e6 4.♘e3 ♚b6 5.♞d2
♜xb2 6.♙d3 ♜a3 7.♞e2



Black is already a pawn up and should find a way to complete his development.

7...b6!

A typical move, in such positions, played to exchange the bad light-squared bishop.

7...c5!? is also a good move, suggested by the engine.

8.0-0 ♘a6 9.♞b3 ♘xd3 10.♜xd3?

10.cxd3 would be correct, when White would retain at least some compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

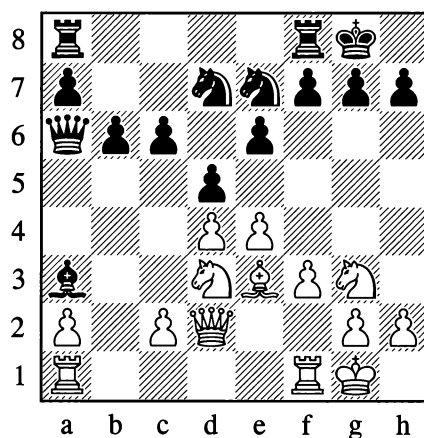
10...♜a6!

Black offers another exchange and this one White can't accept, as he will enter a miserable endgame a pawn down. The queen is well placed on a6, stopping a future c2-c4 by White.

11.♜d2 ♘a3!

The secondary point behind ...♜a6 on the previous move. The a3-square was vacated so that the f8-bishop would find a safe home there. At the same time, the bishop stops the a2-pawn in its tracks.

12.♞g3 ♞d7 13.♞c1 ♞e7 14.♞d3 0-0

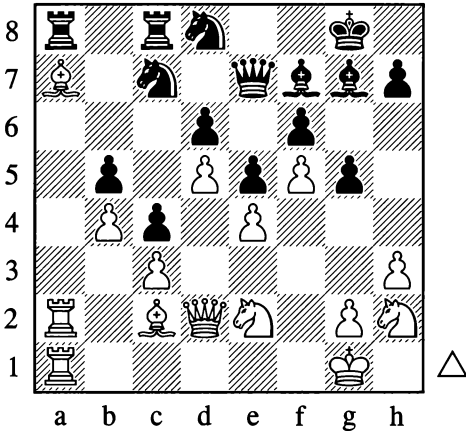


Black has managed to complete his development and his opponent does not have enough, if any, compensation for the pawn deficit.

...0-1

1-6. Anatoly Karpov – Wolfgang Unzicker

Nice (Olympiad) 1974



White's worst piece is his light-squared bishop. Karpov finds the right manoeuvre to exchange it.

33. ♖g3!

Clearing the d1-h5 diagonal for the bishop and controlling the h5-square.

33... ♖b7 34. ♕d1! h6 35. ♕h5

The previously useless bishop on c2 now plays a pivotal role in the conclusion of the game.

35... ♖e8 36. ♖d1 ♖d8 37. ♖a3 ♖f8 38. ♖1a2

Not needing to rush, White creates the option of setting up "Alekhine's Gun" with ♖a1.

38... ♖g8 39. ♖g4!

By using a minor tactic, Karpov improves the position of the h2-knight.

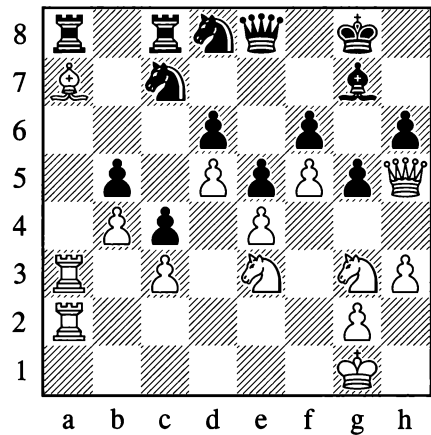
39... ♖f8

After 39... ♖xh5 40. ♖xh5 ♖xh5 41. ♖xf6† the black queen would fall.

40. ♖e3 ♖g8 41. ♖xf7† ♖xf7 42. ♖h5

Now the queen infiltrates the light squares that were weakened by the exchange of the bishop that was previously protecting them.

42... ♖d8



43. ♖g6! ♖f8

After 43... ♖xg6 44. fxg6, access to an excellent outpost on f5 would be granted to the white knights.

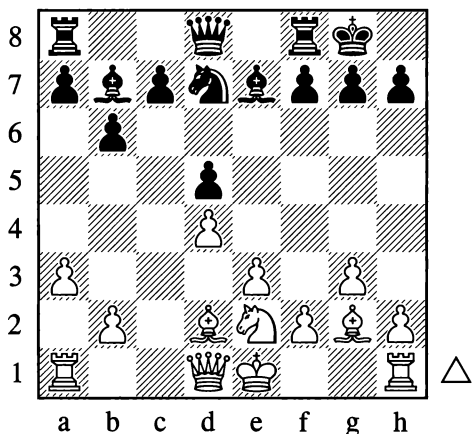
44. ♖h5

Black resigned in a hopeless position.

1-0

1-7. Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

Moscow 2013



12.♙b4!

Carlsen trades off his bad bishop for the opponent's good one. After this, the white bishop on g2 is far better than its passive counterpart on b7.

12...♘f6

After 12...♙xb4† 13.axb4 White's pressure along the semi-open a- and c-files would be more important than his doubled b-pawns.

In case of 12...c5 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♙c3, White manages to activate his dark-squared bishop and targets the d5-pawn.

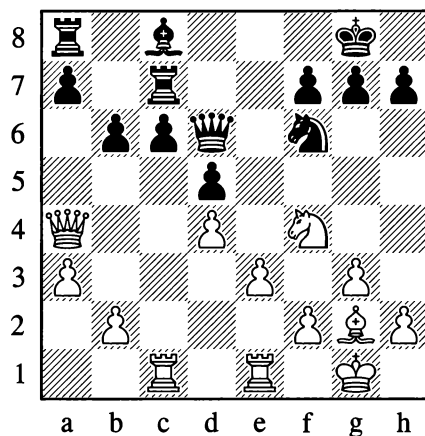
13.0-0 ♖e8 14.♞c1 c6 15.♙xc7 ♞xc7 16.♞e1

A multi-purpose move, moving the rook away from the f1-a6 diagonal, and preparing to double on the c-file with ♞e1-e2-c2 or support an eventual e4-break.

16...♙d6 17.♘f4 ♙c8

17...♞c7 would be better. However, due to the weakness of the pawn on c6 and the passive bishop on b7, White would retain a slight advantage.

18.♙a4 ♞c7



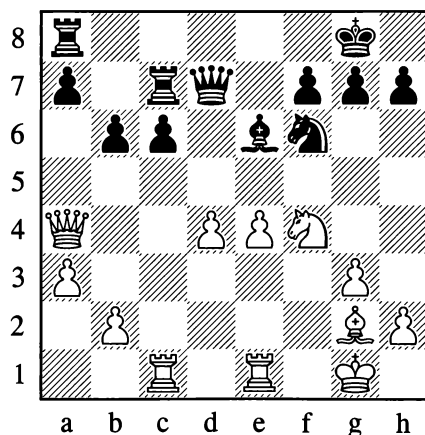
19.f3!

With the idea of creating a mobile pawn centre with e3-e4.

19...♙e6 20.e4 dxe4 21.fxe4

Now White's mobile centre and the activity of his pieces give him a great advantage.

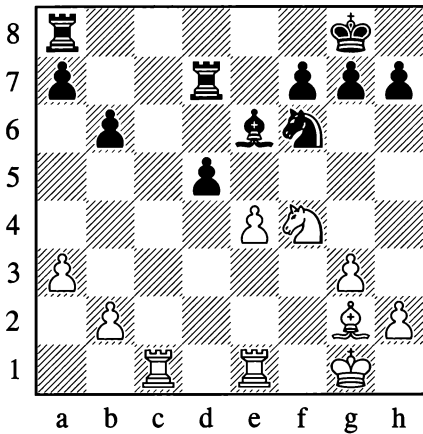
21...♙d7



22.d5!

A well-calculated move that wins a pawn by force.

22...cxd5 23.♙xd7 ♞xd7

**24. ♖xe6!**

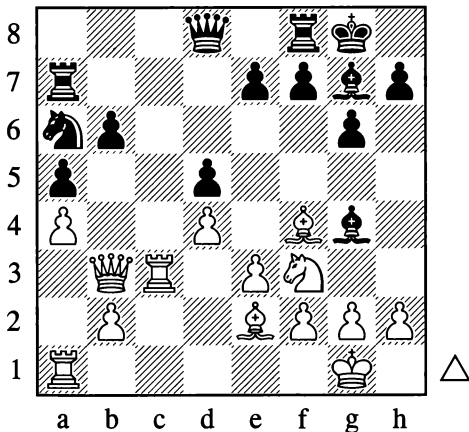
The key exchange in White's calculations, which Carlsen certainly had in mind when playing 22.d5. Without the bishop the light squares in Black's camp are horribly weak.

24...fxe6 25. ♕h3 ♖h8 26.e5 ♘g8 27. ♕xe6 ♜dd8 28. ♜c7 d4 29. ♕d7

Black is helpless against the march of the e-pawn and decided to throw in the towel.
1–0

1-8. Magnus Carlsen – Evgenij Agrest

Copenhagen 2004

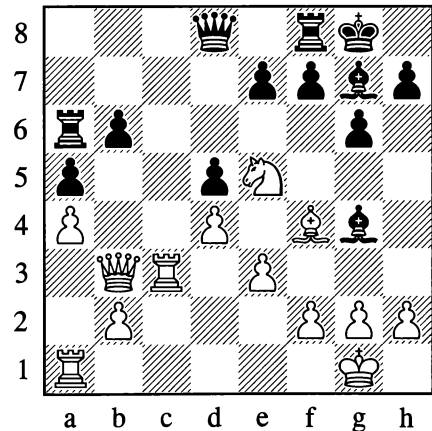


White controls the open c-file, which is of vital importance in this position, as Black

has already weakened some squares on the queenside by playing ...b7-b6 and ...a7-a5. The weaknesses created by these moves can be used as entry points for the white pieces. However, Black hopes to get some stability and some counterplay, by putting his knight on the b4-outpost.

17. ♕xa6!

A multi-purpose move. By removing the knight on a6, Carlsen solves his b4-square problem in a radical way. We should also note, that if the black knight reached b4, it could support the weak c6-square. Another reason for this exchange lies in the fact that Carlsen intends to bring his knight to the central e5-square, but because it was pinned to the bishop on e2, he was unable to do so.

17...♜xa6 18. ♖e5**18...♕e6**

An unpleasant but compulsory decision. Black couldn't retreat the bishop from g4:

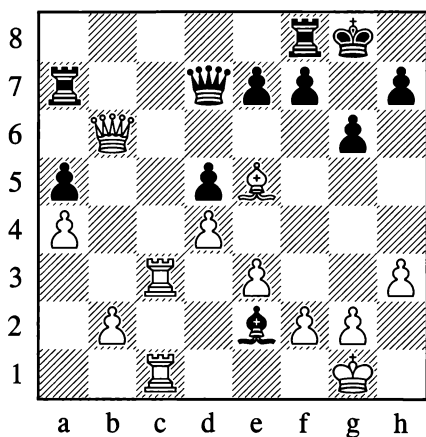
In case of 18...♕f5 19. ♖c6 ♜d7 20. ♜xd5 White would be winning.

After 18...♕e6 19. ♜ac1 Black's awkward rook on a6, the weaknesses on Black's queenside camp and White's domination of the only open file, would give White a huge advantage.

19. ♖xc5

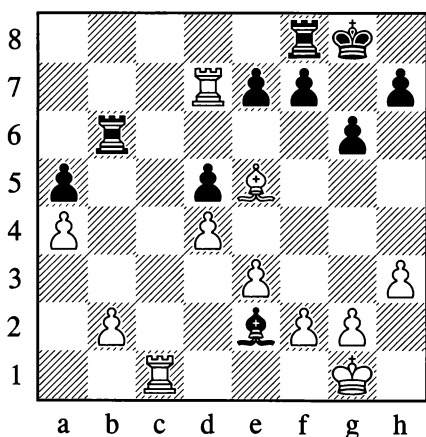
Now the threat is ♖c3-c7.

19...♖a7 20.♖ac1 ♔d7 21.h3 ♕e2 22.♖xb6



White wins a pawn while keeping control. The game is practically over.

22...♖b7 23.♖c7! ♖xb6 24.♖xd7

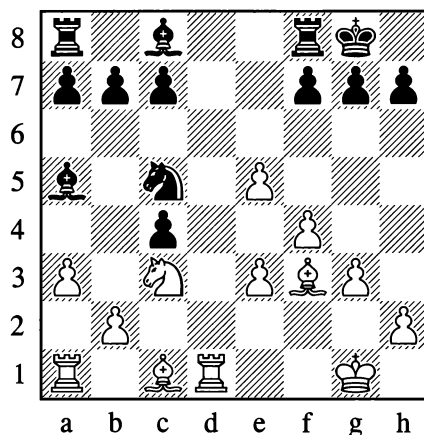
**24...♕c4**

After 24...♖xb2 25.♖cc7 ♕d1 26.♖xe7 ♕xa4 27.♕f4 ♖g7 28.♖a7 ♖b5 29.♕d6 Black is defenceless against the threat of ♖e7-c7 and the fall of his pawn on f7.

25.♖xe7 ♖xb2 26.♖a7 f6 27.♕d6 ♖f7 28.♖xa5
White won.

1-9. Nicolai Vesterbaek Pedersen – Magnus Carlsen

Aalborg (blindfold) 2006



White is extremely weak on the light squares, and, to exploit them, Carlsen decides to remove one of their defenders. Even in a blindfold game, Carlsen does not neglect elegance.

14...♕xc3!

14...c6!? would be another good option: 15.g4 (If 15.♕g2 then 15...♕xc3! 16.bxc3 ♕f5 would be identical to the game.) 15...♕e6 Black is threatening ...♖ad8. 16.f5 ♕c8 The c8-Bishop might have lost two tempos, but now the e5-pawn is vulnerable. 17.♔e4 ♔d3 The e5-pawn would fall.

15.bxc3 ♕f5

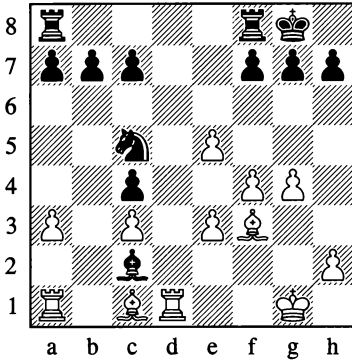
In addition to the weakness of the light squares, the bishop on c1 is also restricted.

16.e4?

By sacrificing a pawn, White tries to open a path for his bishop on c1, but his compensation will not be enough for the material deficit.

He could have managed to hold the position with a strong exchange sacrifice:

16.g4 ♖c2



17.♞d4!

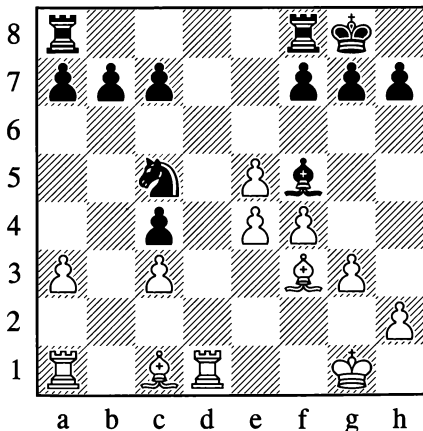
Walking into a fork.

17...♜b3 18.♞a2 ♕d3

Grabbing the exchange on offer would be inadvisable: 18...♜xd4 19.exd4 ♕b3 20.♞a1 c6 21.f5 With more than sufficient compensation for the sacrificed exchange. Black cannot break White's huge central pawn mass.

19.♕d2 ♞ad8 20.♞f2

With a complicated position.



16...♕xe4 17.♕xe4 ♜xe4 18.♞d4

The only way to continue the fight.

18.♕b2 is way too passive. After 18...♞fd8 White has no counterplay, and Black is completely winning.

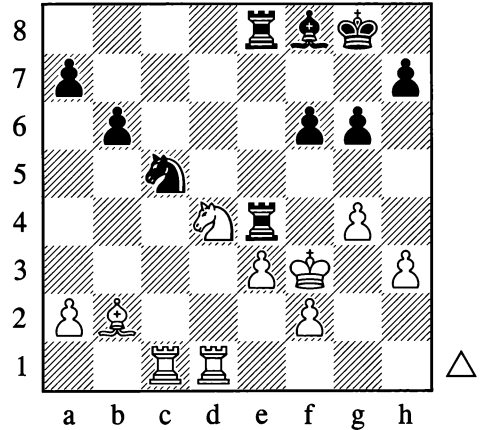
18...♜xc3 19.♞xc4 ♜d5 20.♕b2 ♞fd8

Black is a healthy pawn up for no compensation.

...0-1

1-10. Magnus Carlsen – Pavel Eljanov

Wijk aan Zee 2008



White's rooks control two central open files, and they are thirsty to penetrate the opponent's camp, but there is an obstacle on their way: the black knight on c5.

26.♕a3!

A powerful move, wanting to exchange the black knight, or drive it away from the c5-square.

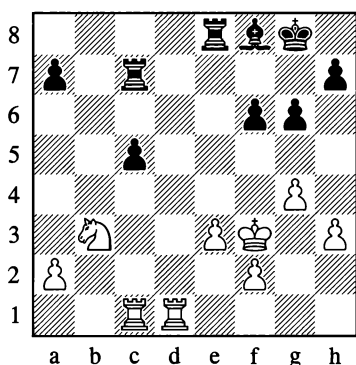
26...♞f7

Another option was:

26...♞e7 27.♕xc5 bxc5 28.♜b3

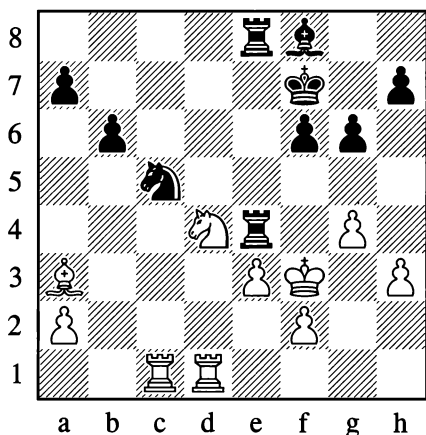
Of course, not 28.♞xc5 due to 28...♞xe3† and the c5-rook falls.

28...♞c7



29.♘a5! ♞e6 30.♘c4

The weak c5-pawn and the mighty knight on c4 would give White a huge advantage.



27.♞c2

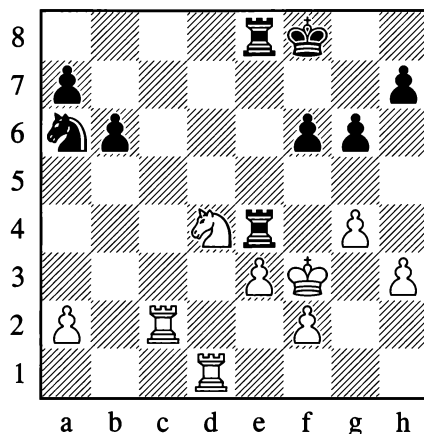
27.♙xc5!? would be consistent and strong. There could follow 27...♙xc5 28.♘c6 ♞a4 29.♞d7† ♙g8 30.♞c2 a5 31.♞cd2 and White would have an advantage.

27...♘a6?

A mistake.

27...♞4e7 was a better try. The e4-rook needs to backtrack to stop hanging and allow the e8-rook to move freely. After 28.♙xc5 bxc5 29.♘b3 ♞c7 Black would have put up more stubborn resistance.

28.♙xf8 ♔xf8

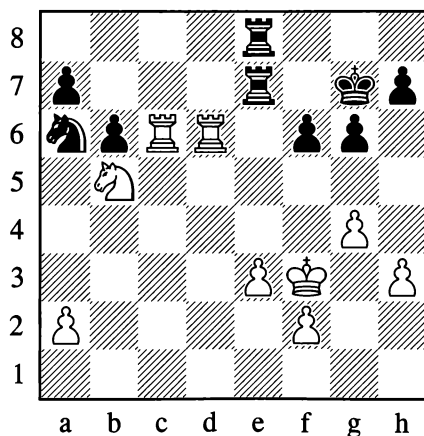


29.♞c6

Penetrating the black camp with the rook looks very natural.

However, 29.♘c6! would be even stronger: 29...♘b4 30.♘xb4 ♞xb4 31.♞c6 f5 (After 31...♙f7 32.♞dd6 f5 33.gxf5 gxf5 34.♞f6† ♙g7 35.♞xf5 White would be winning.) 32.gxf5 gxf5 33.♞d5 The f5-pawn falls.

29...♙g7 30.♘b5 ♞4e7 31.♞dd6



31...♘c5?!

Protecting the f6-pawn because of a trick.

31...♖b4

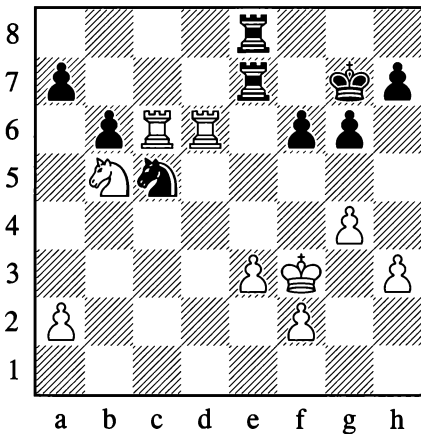
This would be better.

32.♞c1 ♜a6

After 32...♜xa2 33.♞a1 ♜b4 34.♞xa7 ♞xa7 35.♜xa7 ♞b8 36.♞d7+ ♖g8 37.♜b5 White's powerful rook on the seventh rank, along with the possibility of further penetration into the opponent's camp with the knight and king, would give him an advantage, especially in practical play.

33.♞cd1

Still, White's active pieces would give him a slight advantage.



32.♜c7!

The natural 32.♞xf6? would have been a big mistake, due to 32...♜d7 threatening both the f6-rook and a fork on e5.

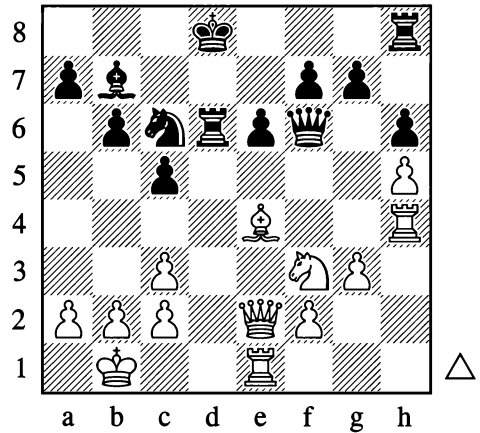
32...♞f8 33.h4

The fully active and harmonious pieces guarantee White a significant advantage, while it is hard to suggest a productive move for Black.

...1–0

1-11. Parham Maghsoodloo – Ahmed Adly

Sharjah 2021



White has many good moves to prove his advantage, but the way that Parham plays is simple and instructive.

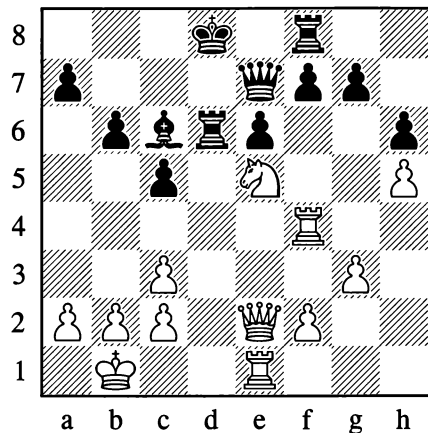
22.♞xc6!

A preparatory exchange, in order to activate his other pieces.

22...♞xc6 23.♜e5

With the c6-knight gone, the white knight can jump forward. The threat now is ♞h4-f4.

23...♞f8 24.♞f4 ♞e7



25. ♖xc6†!

The knight clears the way for another piece to come to e5.

25... ♜xc6 26. ♖e5

White has a double threat of ♖b8† and ♖xg7.

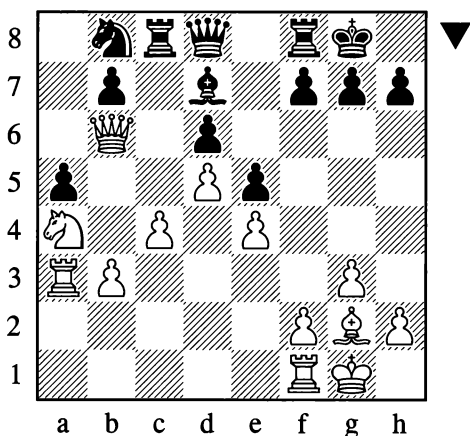
26... ♜d6 27. ♖xg7 f5 28. ♖e5

White is completely winning. He is a pawn up, he has more active pieces, and his king is much safer than his counterpart.

...1–0

1-12. Francois Marchand – Amir Bagheri

Nantes 2005

**21... ♙xa4!**

Leaving White with a bad bishop, restricted by his own pawn structure.

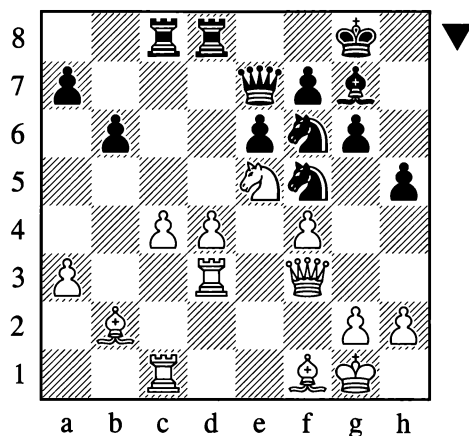
22. ♖xd8 ♜fxd8 23. ♜xa4 b6 24. ♜b1 ♖a6

Black has a pleasant advantage with a “duel” of a good knight against the opponent’s bad bishop.

...0–1

1-13. Oliver Dimakiling – Parham Maghsoodloo

Sharjah 2021

**22... ♖g4!**

A strong move by Maghsoodloo. After this clever exchange, all the black pieces will be activated and will easily find their ideal squares. The f6-knight was his least active piece, as everyone else is already putting pressure on the hanging c4- and d4-pawns.

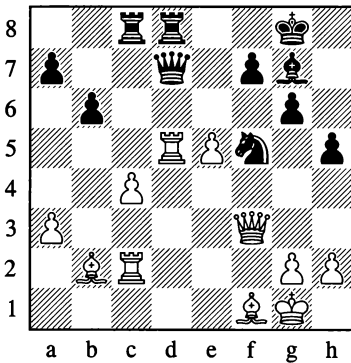
23. ♖xg4

It does not help to go for:

23. ♜c2 ♖xe5 24. fxe5 ♖d7 25. d5

It is natural for White to do something radical, as otherwise Black would continue to mount pressure against the hanging pawns. His next move was probably **... ♖a4**.

25... exd5 26. ♜xd5



26... ♖xd5! 27. cxd5 ♜xc2 28. ♜b3

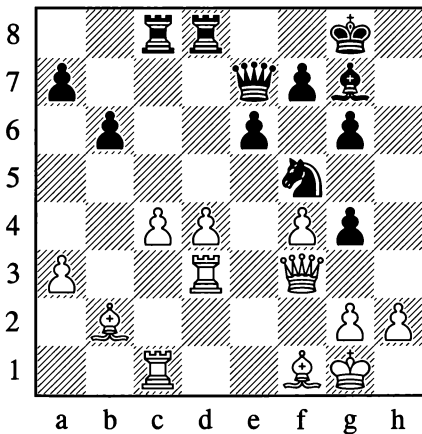
The only move.

In the event of 28. ♙a1 ♙h6! 29. ♙d3 ♙e3† 30. ♙f1 ♜f2† Black would win.

28... ♜xb2! 29. ♜xb2 ♜xd5 30. ♜b3 ♜xe5

Black's active pieces, his safer king and his queenside pawn majority would give him a decisive advantage.

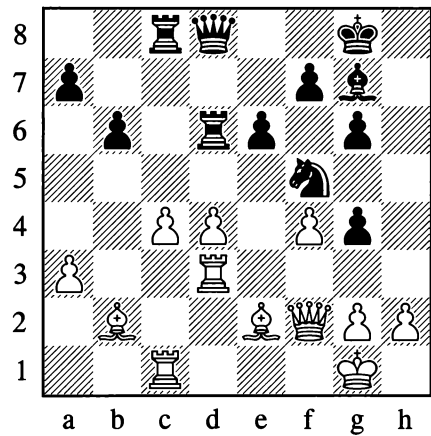
23... hxc4



24. ♜f2

Trading the d4-pawn for the g4-pawn seems self-destructive: 24. ♜xg4 ♙xd4 25. ♜cd1 ♙f5 26. ♙xg7 ♙xg7 27. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 28. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 29. ♜f3 ♜d4† 30. ♙h1 ♙e3 Black would be winning due to the opponent's vulnerable king, passive bishop and weak pawn structure. The queen and knight team shows their superiority against the queen and bishop team!

24... ♜d6 25. ♙e2 ♜d8



The queen gets involved, piling pressure on the weak white structure with a decisive effect.

26. ♙xg4 ♙xd4 27. ♙xd4 ♜xd4 28. ♜xd4 ♙xd4

Black's better pawn structure and his strong knight in the centre give him a big advantage. ...0-1

Chapter 2

Exchanges and Space

Imagine you are planning a party, and you want to invite your friends. You would be happy to invite many of your friends to the party, but your house is small and does not allow you to do so. If you had more space, you would be able to welcome more guests.

The relationship between having space and pieces in chess works in the same way: fewer pieces need less space. Disparity in space is one of the more common imbalances and plays an important role in evaluating the position. However, like with all other imbalances, judging by one factor alone may not be enough to accurately assess the situation.

Usually, the player who has a spatial advantage has more freedom and finds it easier to transfer his pieces from one wing to another. So, in general, it is recommended that when you have more space, you should avoid unnecessary exchanges; and since the advantage of space is long-term in nature, you should try not to rush, but gradually restrict your opponent's counterplay until it is time for decisive action.

Of course, things are not quite so simple in practice, and the realization of the advantage requires good technique. In this chapter, we will try to explain the relationship between exchanges and space using instructive examples, while at the same time addressing exceptions to the rules when necessary.

Let's start by addressing the relationship between space and different types of pieces.

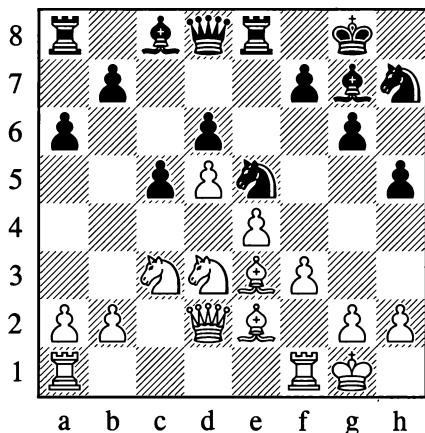
Minor Pieces

Out of all pieces, the minors are the ones mostly affected by a disparity in space. In the following game, we will witness a battle revolving around this theme: one side craves exchanges while the other refuses to accept them.

Magnus Carlsen – Ernesto Inarkiev

Dubai (rapid) 2014

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.f3 c5 4.d5 d6 5.e4 ♙g7
6.♘c3 0-0 7.♙g5 h6 8.♙e3 e6 9.♚d2 exd5
10.cxd5 ♞e8 11.♘ge2 ♘bd7 12.♘c1 a6
13.♙e2 h5 14.0-0 ♘h7 15.♘d3 ♘e5



Here we have the Benoni pawn structure, in which White has more pawns in the centre, so his main idea is to push them whenever he gets the chance.

16.♘f2!

A strong retreat. Having more space, Carlsen correctly avoids the exchange of knights and wants to exploit the placement of the e5-knight by pushing his central pawns with tempo. It is worth noting that the f2-square is typically good for a knight in this structure.

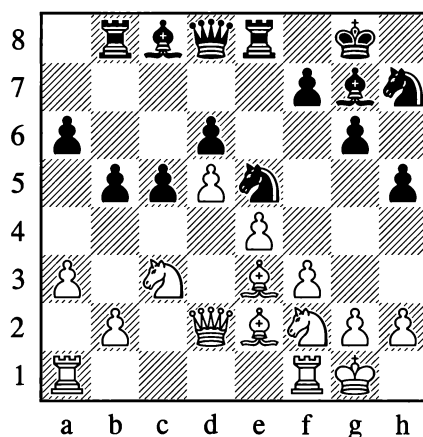
16...b5

Naturally, Black plays on the side of his pawn majority.

17.a3

Stopping ...b5-b4.

17...♞b8



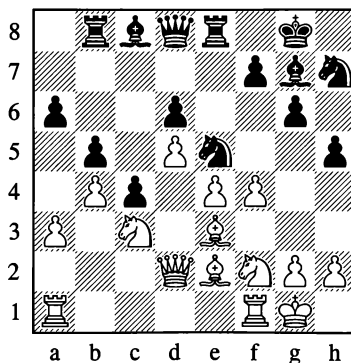
18.b4!

Before launching his operation in the centre, Carlsen nips in the bud his opponent's queenside plans. On top of that, by playing b2-b4 he forces his opponent to move his c-pawn and, as a result, the d4-square becomes available to his minor pieces.

18...cxb4

Trying to keep the position closed wouldn't help:

18...c4 19.f4



19...♘g4

After 19...♘d7 20.a4 ♘b6 21.a5! ♘d7 22.♞ae1 White's space advantage, combined with the prospect of a future e4-e5, the weakness of the c6-square and Black's overextended kingside, would give White a huge advantage.

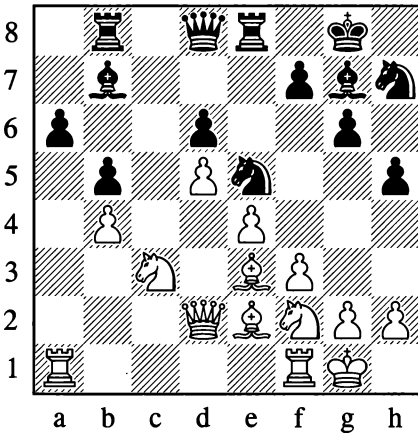
20. ♖xg4! hxg4 21. ♕d4! ♕xd4 22. ♖xd4 ♜b6
23. ♖xb6 ♝xb6 24. ♞fe1

White would have a pleasant advantage due to his better pawn structure and more active pieces, while the c8-bishop seems of little use.

19. axb4

Because Black's pawn majority is blocked, White has achieved his first goal, which was to restrict his opponent's counterplay. Now his plan of advancing e4-e5 becomes more powerful.

19... ♕b7



20. f4?!

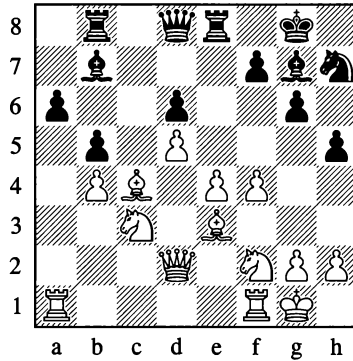
A better option was 20. ♕d4! ♝c8 21. ♜cd1! when the knight heads to e3 to cover the c4- and g4-squares. A possible continuation could be: 21... ♜c4 22. ♕xc4 ♕xd4 23. ♖xd4 ♝xc4 24. ♖d2 ♜f8 25. ♜e3 ♝c8 26. f4 With a great advantage for White. Black is cramped, without counterplay, his king is weak, and the b7-bishop is terrible. Note how White exchanged Black's useful pieces and left him with only his passive ones.

20... ♜d7?!

Missing an opportunity to obtain counterplay.

Correct would be:

20... ♜c4! 21. ♕xc4



21... ♝c8!

The point, and what was probably missed by Inarkiev.

22. ♜xb5!?

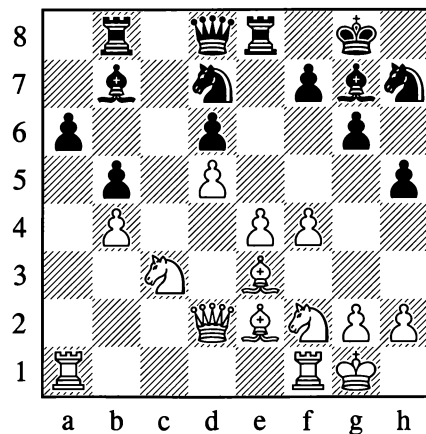
After 22. ♝ac1 ♝xc4 Black's active pieces give him a good game.

22... ♕xa1

Now a sample line could be:

23. ♕a2 axb5 24. ♝xa1 ♜f6 25. ♕b1 ♜g4
26. ♜xg4 hxg4

With a complicated struggle.



21. ♕d4

White has a slight but pleasant advantage: the centre is completely at his disposal and his pawn majority remains mobile. We should not

forget that Black's kingside has already been weakened by ...h7-h5.

21...♞c8 22.♞ac1 ♖hf6

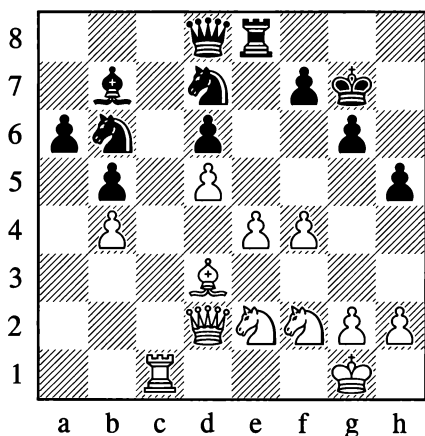
After 22...♞xd4 23.♞xd4 ♞b6 24.♞d3 White's position would be preferable, and if 24...♞c4?! 25.♖a4! ♞a7 26.♞xc4 bxc4 27.♞xc4, White would be a healthy pawn up and Black would not have any compensation.

23.♙d3 ♖b6 24.♖e2 ♞xc1 25.♞xc1 ♖fd7?

Swapping the dark-squared bishops reveals the weaknesses in Black's kingside.

25...♖c4 would be interesting, trying to weaken White's protection of the e4-pawn. When the opponent has a lasting advantage, we should try to complicate the game by using tactical means.

26.♙xg7 ♖xg7



27.♞b2†!

27.h3! would be strong, planning to meet 27...♞f6, trying to control the dark squares, with 28.g4!. Now after hxg4 29.hxg4 White is planning g4-g5, and if 29...♞h4 30.g5! ♞h8 31.♞b2† ♖g8 32.♞c7, he would have a huge advantage. Black's counterplay along the h-file does not lead anywhere.

27...♞f6 28.♞xf6†?

Considering White's space advantage and the weakness of the black king, it would have been better for White to avoid exchanging queens. Hence, 28.♞d2 was better.

28...♖xf6 29.g3 ♖c4?

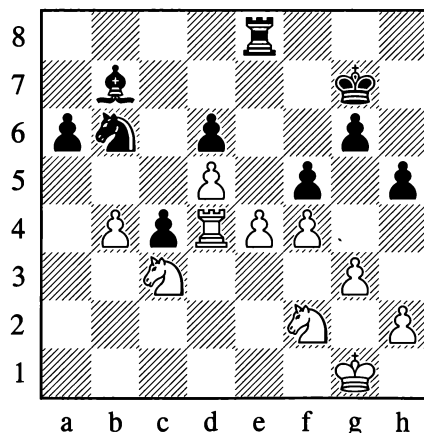
Creating an unnecessary weakness.

Black should have played 29...♞c8, with equality. After exchanging rooks Black can prepare ...f7-f5, when White's space advantage disappears.

30.♙xc4 bxc4 31.♖c3 ♖d7 32.♞d1

White's rook is heading to d4, from where it will attack the c4-pawn while also protecting the weakness on e4.

32...f5 33.♞d4 ♖b6



34.♖fd1!

A strong manoeuvre to transfer the knight to e3.

34...fxe4 35.♖e3 ♙c8 36.♖xe4

White wins a pawn by force. He has obtained a clear advantage and went on to win without too much trouble.

...1-0

By keeping pieces on the board and restraining the opponent's counterplay, Carlsen managed to keep his advantage intact for the larger part of this game. It may look like this was a game played against one bad piece, the b7-bishop, much like examples we saw in Chapter 1. Nevertheless, this is not the full story: that bishop could have been improved by staying on the c8-h3 diagonal, but there was no room for it. On c8 it would disturb the activity of the rooks, and d7 was needed for the knight.

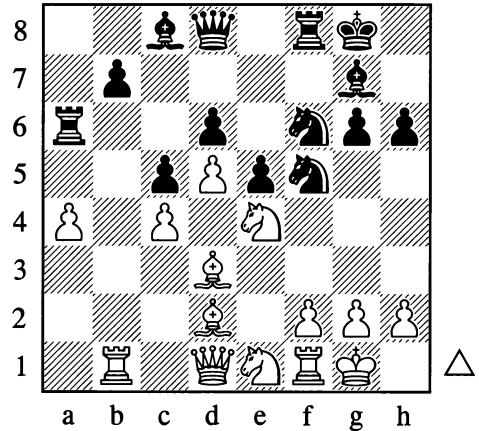
Imagine Black's position without any minor pieces. He would have had absolutely no problems! One minor piece would still be OK; two would start feeling overcrowded; three, as we saw, were too many. It probably wouldn't be a problem if one of them was the g7-bishop, as it is practically always a strong piece in the Benoni structure. However, this was the one piece Carlsen made sure was exchanged.

Rooks

Space does not only relate to minor pieces. Major pieces are also affected by a space advantage, especially the rooks. One could claim that having more space is directly correlated with having the more active rooks. Imagine how easier it is to move from one side of the board to the other when your pawns are placed further down the board. It is likely that at least one rank is available for the rooks to use as an avenue connecting the two flanks.

Amir Bagheri – Neuris Delgado Ramirez

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022



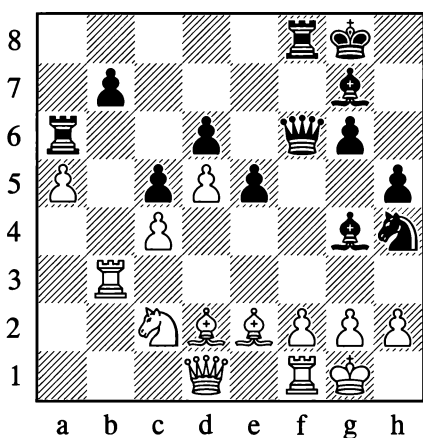
This is a position that occurred in the King's Indian Bayonet Attack. The d5-pawn provides White with more space, giving him more freedom to operate on both sides. White has taken over the excellent e4-outpost, which gives him a good grip in such structures. The black rook on the queenside is out of play and his pawn on b7 is also vulnerable on the semi-open b-file, tying the light-squared bishop to its defence. Black's dark-squared bishop is bad, constricted by the black structure.

There are also hidden weaknesses such as the e6-outpost, which may be used by White's pieces in the future. We should not forget that the white rook on b1 is flexible and can be transferred to the kingside if necessary.

18. ♖xf6†!

After 18.a5 Black has 18... ♗xe4! 19. ♔xe4 b6! and immediately solves most of his problems by removing the weakness on the b-file and activating his a6-rook.

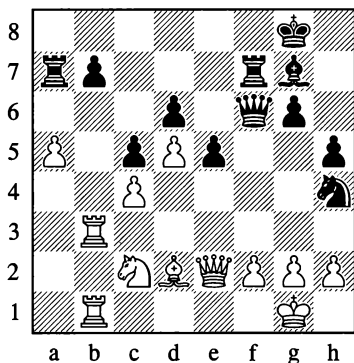
18... ♖xf6



22...♙c8

Exchanging light-squared bishops makes Black's weaknesses clearly felt:

22...♙xe2 23.♙xe2 ♜f7 24.♜fb1 ♜a7



25.♞e1!

The knight begins his journey to reach the e4-outpost!

25...♞f5 26.♞f3 ♙h6

The natural 26...♞d4 27.♞xd4 cxd4 allows 28.♜f3 ♙e7 and White has lots of options to retain his advantage, the strongest being: 29.♙e4! Centralizing the queen, hitting the g6-pawn and stopping ...e5-e4. 29...♜xf3 30.gxf3! Black's pawns are blockaded, his pieces are passive, and his position is full of weaknesses.

27.♙xh6 ♞xh6 28.♞d2 ♙d8 29.♞e4 ♞f5 30.♙d2 ♜xa5 31.♞g5 ♞d4 32.♜g3

The opponent's weaknesses and his passive position would give White a big advantage.

23.♙d3 ♜f7 24.♙e4

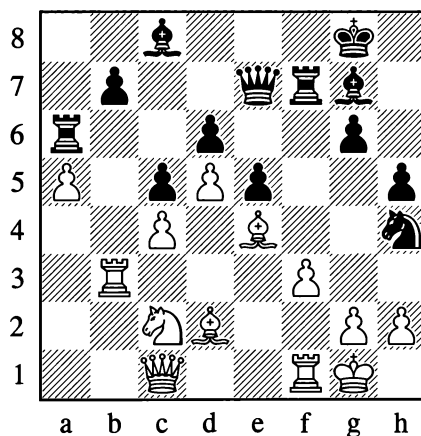
White has established an advantage in the centre and keeps the opponent's position clamped tight.

24...♙g4 25.♙c1!

White creates a deadly threat of trapping the black queen with ♙g5.

25.f3 ♙c8 26.♙e1 ♙e7 27.g3 ♞f5 28.g4 is again suggested by the engine, but the continuation White chose seems more methodical and simpler to the human eye.

25...♙e7 26.f3 ♙c8

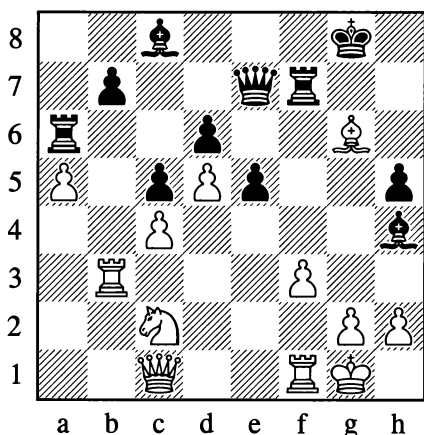


27.♙g5!?

An important decision, that changes the nature of the game.

Also possible was 27.g3 ♞f5 28.g4 hxg4 29.fxg4 ♙h4 30.♙d1 ♞d4 31.♜g3 ♜f6 32.♞xd4 exd4 33.♙b1 and with the g6-pawn falling, White would gain a winning position. Note how out of play the rook on a6 is.

27...♙f6 28.♙xh4 ♙xh4 29.♙xg6



29...Bg7?

Black should have played:

29...Bf6

Making it much harder for White to finish the game.

30.♙e4!

Taking the pawn on h5 would allow Black to gain counterplay: 30.♙xh5? ♖h7 31.♙g4 ♙xg4 32.fxg4 ♖xf1† White has a much worse version of the game continuation. There, Black got stuck with a useless rook on g7, while White used his rook on f1 to its maximum potential. After 33.♙xf1 ♖xa5, the wayward a6-rook returns to action, while White's king is severely weakened.

30...♖xa5 31.♖d2 ♖a6 32.g3 ♖g7 33.♙h1 ♙g5 34.♖e2

White keeps some advantage, but it is not so easy to convert it into a full point.

30.♙xh5 ♖xa5 31.♙g4!

By returning the pawn White correctly decides to get rid of his opponent's bishop pair, weaken the black king, and soften the defence of the b7-pawn.

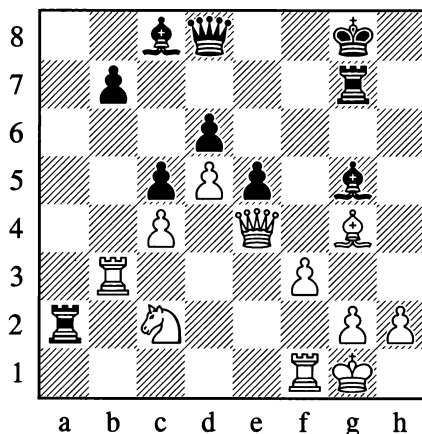
31...♙g5

In the event of 31...♙xg4 32.fxg4 ♖xg4 33.♖h6 ♖a8 34.♙e3 White would be completely winning.

32.♖e1 ♖a2

After 32...♖a8 33.♙xc8 ♖xc8 34.♙e3 ♙xe3† 35.♖xe3 ♖g5 36.♖e2 White would have an unquestionable advantage: he would be a pawn up, Black's b7-pawn is backward, and the opponent's king would be exposed.

33.♖e4 ♖d8



34.♖a3!

White does not allow the opponent to get any counterplay and destroys Black's last hopes.

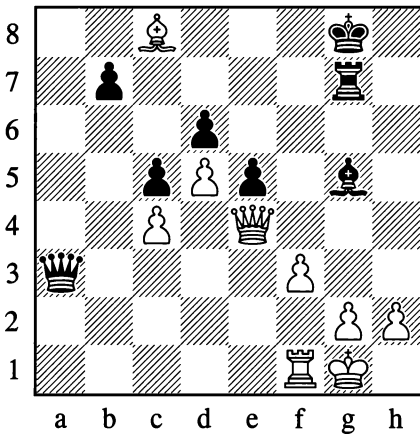
34...♖xa3

34...♖b2 35.♖a8 and White wins.

35.♙xa3 ♖a5 36.♙xc8!

A powerful exchange. In positions with opposite-coloured bishops, especially in the middlegame, it is as if the side with an attack has an extra piece. Of course, 36.♙b5 was also winning, but why not use the proven principles to our benefit?

36...♖xa3

**37.f4!**

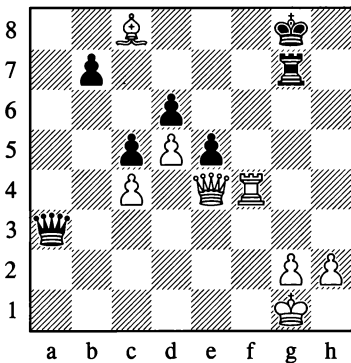
The last blow, getting the f1-rook into play.

37...exf4

37...♙h6 would be met by 38.♞f5, with deadly threats to the opponent's king.

After 37...♙f6 38.fxe5 ♙xe5 39.♙e6† White would be winning.

If 37...♙xf4 then 38.♞xf4! wins by force:



38...♞a1† (38...exf4 39.♞e8† ♙h7 40.♞h5† ♙g8 41.♙e6† ♙f8 42.♞h8† leads to a quick checkmate.) 39.♞f1 ♞d4† 40.♞xd4 cxd4 41.♙e6† ♙h7 White's material advantage is more than enough to win the game slowly, but it happens that there's a quick win with 42.c5! dxc5 43.d6, when the passed d-pawn decides the game.

38.♞e8†

Black is getting mated, so he resigned.

38...♙h7 39.♙f5† ♙h6 40.♞h8† ♞h7 41.♞xh7# would be the end of the game if Black had decided to continue.

1–0

White's mighty rook on the third rank played a pivotal role in the result of this game. Comparing it with the passive rook on a6 tells us exactly what we need to know about the relationship between rooks and a space advantage.

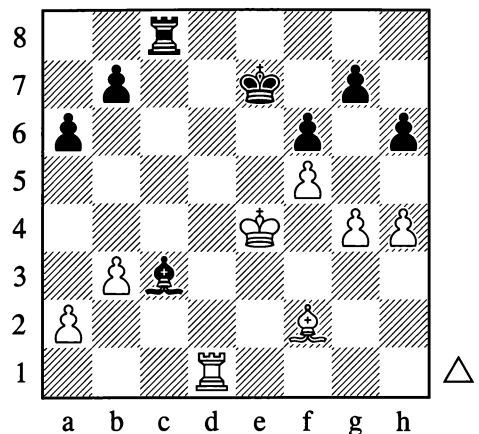
King

Minor pieces and rooks are not the only ones influenced by a space advantage. In the endgame, a space advantage very often translates to a more active king.

What is more, a more active king, placed further down the board, can make the position resemble a space advantage even without having the more advanced pawns. That's mostly because an advanced king, apart from being more active, can have the effect of "shouldering" his counterpart, not allowing him to be activated.

Magnus Carlsen – Anish Giri

Wijk aan Zee (rapid) 2018



Black's kingside pawns are blocked on dark squares and White's king is more active than his counterpart. These facts are pretty good evidence of White potentially having a big advantage in the same-coloured bishop endgame.

36.♖c1!

Carlsen forces the exchange of rooks. Without them, the king is allowed to show his true strength.

36...♜c6?

After this mistake, Black will have practically no chance to save the game. Creating a new weakness on the queenside is one too many.

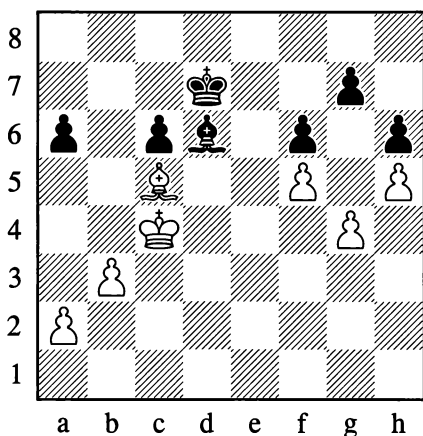
Better was: 36...♗d7 37.♗d3 ♕e5 38.♞xc8 ♗xc8 39.♗c4 ♕d6 40.♗d5 ♗d7 White retains good winning chances but the game objectively remains within the drawing margin.

37.♗d3 ♕b4 38.♞xc6 bxc6 39.♗c4 ♕d6 40.♕c5

The pawn endgame is hopeless if Black takes on c5 because of the white king's activity (space advantage). Using that as a weapon, White will find a way for his king to penetrate the black camp.

40...♗d7 41.h5

Fixing all the black kingside pawns on dark squares.



41...♕f4

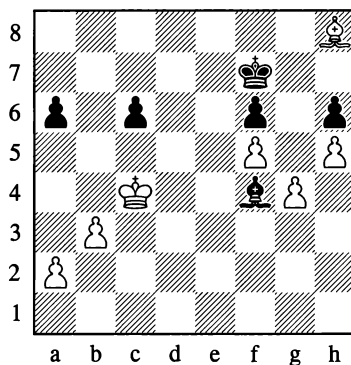
Obviously, the pawn ending would again be hopeless for Black: 41...♕xc5 42.♗xc5 ♗c7 43.b4 ♗b7 44.♗d6 ♗b6 45.a4 White wins.

42.♕f8 ♗e8 43.♕c5

Carlsen is careful and does not let his bishop get trapped.

It would be naïve to go for:

43.♕xg7? ♗f7 44.♕h8



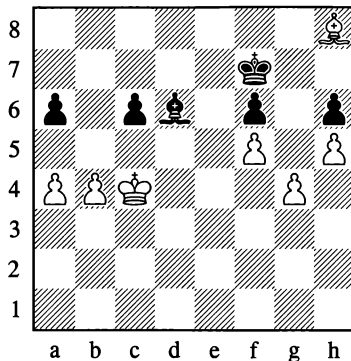
44...♕d6!

The correct way to do it, stopping White from entering with ♗c5.

Not 44...♕e5? 45.♗c5 ♗g8 46.♗xc6 ♗xh8 47.♗b6 when the black king is out of play and the bishop cannot do anything to stop the white passers.

45.b4 ♕e7 46.a4 ♕d6

Black shouldn't get too ambitious with 46...♗g8 as 47.♕xf6! wins for White.

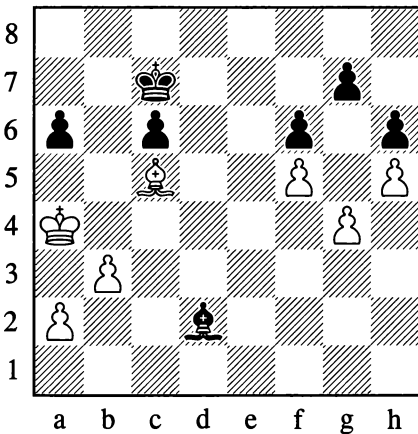


White's bishop is stuck in the corner of the board and his king is not able to penetrate. The game is a positional draw.

43...♔d7 44.♕b4

After unsuccessfully trying to go through c5, Carlsen backtracks and finds out that the a5-square is plenty good enough as an entry point.

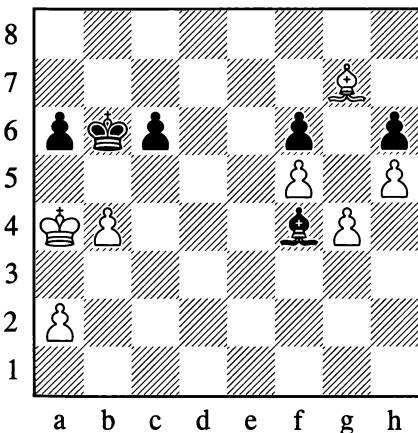
44...♙d2† 45.♕a4 ♖c7



46.b4

The white king cannot be prevented from reaching a5 and capturing the a6-pawn without the kingside collapsing.

46...♙f4 47.♙f8 ♕b6 48.♙xg7



The game is over.

48...♙g5 49.♙f8 ♙f4 50.♙e7 ♙g5 51.♕b3 ♕c7 52.♕c4 ♕d7 53.♙c5 ♕c7 54.♕d3 ♕d7 55.♙e3

Black resigned.

1–0

The advanced white pawns on the kingside, his more advanced king and the superior bishop didn't give Black any chance.

After the rooks got exchanged, the more advanced white pawns stopped being the primary cause of White's space advantage and that role was instead handed over to his more active king. By controlling vital squares in the centre and on the queenside, his majesty became the dominating factor that gave the white pieces a lot more mobility and active prospects while tying down the opponent's king to the passive defence of Black's many weaknesses.

To better understand and generalize this notion, we created the following segment.

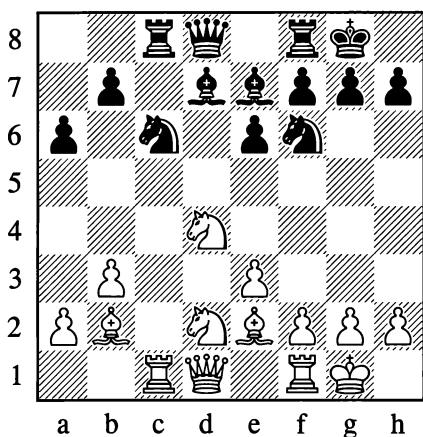
Space and Piece Activity

When it comes to defining a space advantage, it is generally thought that it means having more advanced pawns in the centre. However, in some cases, having more active pieces can also be interpreted as, or feel like, a space advantage.

Wesley So – Alireza Firouzja

Wijk aan Zee 2020

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 e6 5.♙xc4 c5 6.0–0 a6 7.b3 cxd4 8.♗xd4 ♙e7 9.♙b2 0–0 10.♙e2 ♙d7 11.♗d2 ♗c6 12.♙c1 ♙c8



The pawn structure is symmetrical but, due to his more active pieces, White has a slight advantage. Notice how the bishop on d7 disturbs the coordination of the black army.

13. ♘f3!

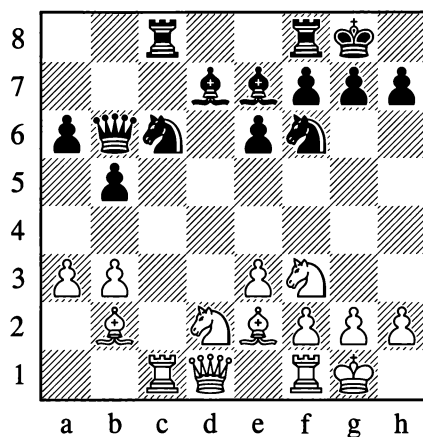
The pawn structures of the two armies are almost identical, yet White has a lot more squares available for his pieces. Practically speaking, that could even be the definition of a space advantage.

Thus, having more space, So prevents unnecessary exchanges and tries to keep more pieces on the board. His idea is easy to understand: prevent his opponent from activating his pieces and increase the pressure on his position.

13...b5

Firouzja tries to gain more space on the queenside and control the vital c4-square, but in this type of pawn structure weakening the c5-square can cause Black long-term troubles. In such symmetrical positions, every small imbalance must be considered.

14. a3 ♖b6



15. ♖c2!

So explains: "Slowly improving the position of my pieces. The idea of this mysterious rook move is to free squares and swing my queen and the other rook over to the queenside."

The American super-GM also points out that White stands better due to his control over important squares such as d4, e4 and e5, as well as having more harmonious pieces. At the same time, Black has no weaknesses, so the advantage is still only a slight one at this stage.

15...e5!?

A new move that is in the style of Alireza Firouzja. He doesn't like to play passively, so he tries to free himself as soon as possible.

After 15... ♖fd8 16. ♖b1 h6 17. ♖fc1 ♖b7 18. ♖a1 ♔e8 19. h3 White had a slight advantage due to his more active pieces in Lingnau – Stevic, Germany 2020.

16. ♔d3

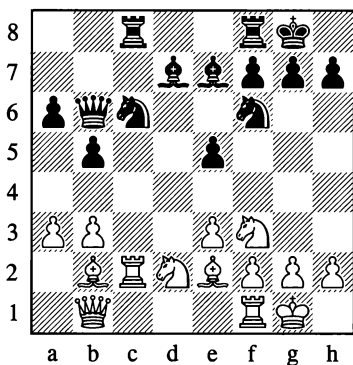
Activating the bishop and clearing the e2-square for the queen.

After 16. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 17. ♔xe5 ♔xa3 Black would be completely OK because of his queenside pawn majority.

A better choice would have been:

16. ♖b1!

Sticking to the plan.



16...e4

16...♙f5?? would be a blunder due to 17. ♖xc6! and White wins.

16...♜fd8 is the safest continuation, when 17. ♖fc1 keeps a slight advantage for White.

The text move is the critical option to consider, but White is well placed to meet it:

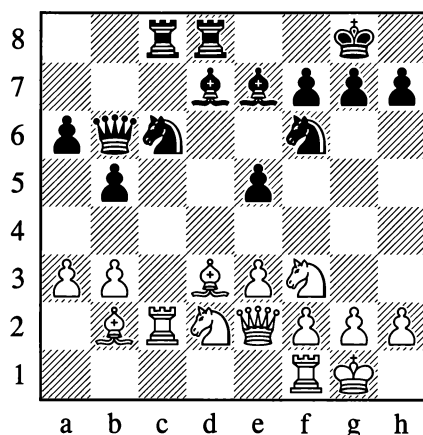
17. ♘g5! ♙f5 18. ♙xf6

18.b4!? ♜fe8 19. ♖fc1 would also lead to a pleasant advantage for White. In the event of 19...h6 20. ♘h3 ♙xh3 21. gxh3 ♜b7 22. ♙f1 ♙d6 23. ♙g2 White's castled position is a bit damaged, but his bishop pair and the weak e4-pawn give him an advantage.

18...♙xf6 19. ♘gxe4

White is a pawn up, and Black's bishop pair can't fully compensate for it.

16...♜fd8 17. ♖e2



17...♙g4

Not the most accurate.

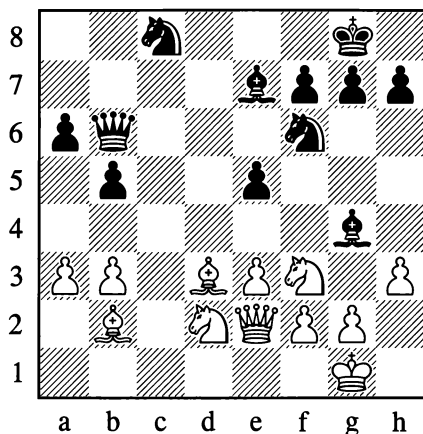
17...♙e6! was a better option, when the game could continue: 18.b4 (18. ♖fc1 e4! was the point behind ...♙e6. The b3-pawn is hanging. 19. ♘xe4 ♙xb3 20. ♘xf6 ♙xf6 21. ♙xf6 ♙xc2 22. ♙xd8 ♙xd3 23. ♖xd3 ♜xd8 and a draw would be the most likely result.) 18...♖b8! 19. ♖fc1 ♖d6 With equality.

18. ♖fc1 ♘a7

Alireza tries to simplify the position but it comes at the cost of deactivating his knight.

18...♖b7 would be a better move.

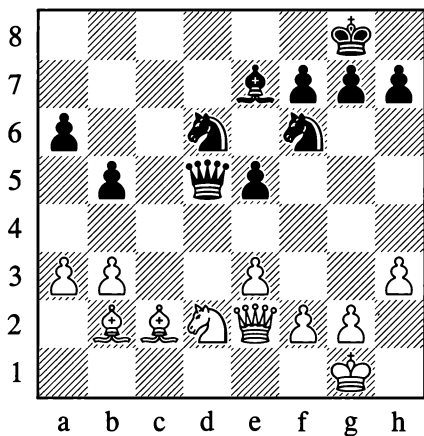
19. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 20. ♖xc8 ♘xc8 21.h3



21...♙xf3

Black is forced to give up his bishop for the opponent's knight.

The positionally desirable response was, of course, 21...♙h5 but it is impossible due to 22.g4 ♙g6 23.♗xe5 ♙xd3 24.♖xd3 when White has a healthy extra pawn.

22.♖xf3 ♖d8 23.♖e2 ♖d5 24.♙c2 ♗d6**25.♖d3!**

White has the two-bishop advantage, so exchanging queens is in his favour. Besides, Black's queen in the centre is really powerful.

25...♖xd3 26.♙xd3

White is better due to his bishop pair, but Black's position remains objectively holdable.

26...♗d7 27.g4 g6 28.♗e4 ♗xe4

After 28...f6 29.♗xd6 ♙xd6 30.♙c1 ♗f7 31.b4 White would have only a slight advantage due to his two bishops.

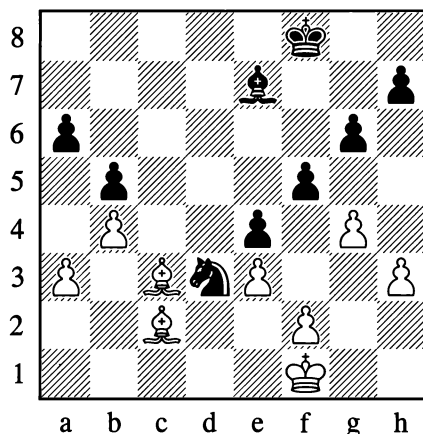
29.♙xe4 ♗c5 30.♙c2 e4?

Unfortunately, this move doesn't work, and this time trying to play actively will cost Alireza the game.

He should have played a solid move like 30...f6.

31.b4 ♗d3 32.♙c3 ♗f8

If 32...♙h4 then 33.♗f1! prepares f2-f3, and if 33...♗xf2? 34.♙e1 White wins.

33.♗f1 f5**34.♗e2?**

Correct would be: 34.gxf5! gxf5 35.♙b3 ♙h4 36.♙d5! White is trying to grab Black's weak queenside pawns. 36...♗xf2 37.♙b7 ♗xh3 38.♙xa6 ♗e7 39.♙xb5 and White's two connected passed pawns would decide the game.

34...♙d8?

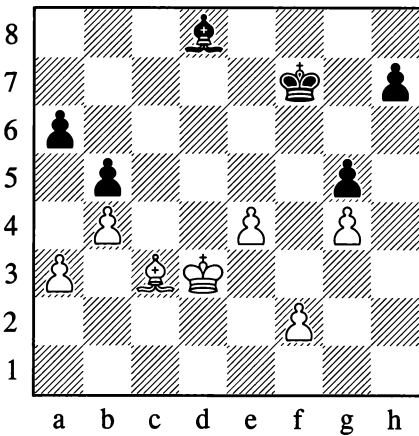
Missing a golden opportunity.

Black should have played 34...h5! 35.gxf5 gxf5 36.♙xd3 exd3† 37.♗xd3 ♗f7 when, despite being a pawn down, he has a simple fortress.

35.♙xd3 exd3† 36.♗xd3 ♗f7 37.e4 fxg4 38.hxg4 g5?

The last mistake.

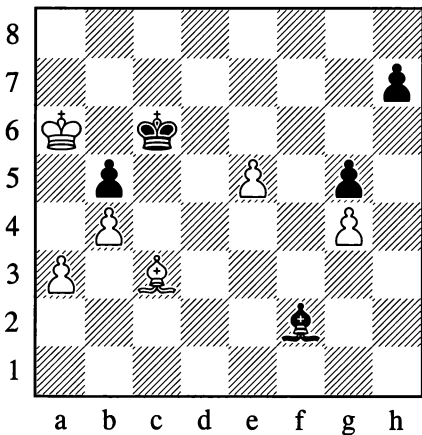
38...h5! should have been played: 39.gxh5 gxh5 White has two connected passed pawns in the centre and, from a human point of view, it seems that White should be winning. However, strangely enough, Stockfish 15 at depth 60 believes that White only has a slight advantage!



39.♔d4!

White's king penetrates the opponent's queenside camp. Black is doomed.

39...♙b6† 40.♔d5 ♙xf2 41.♔c6 ♔e6
42.♔b7 ♔d7 43.♔xa6 ♔c6 44.e5



White is completely winning. Black's pawn majority is blocked, and in addition to the passed e-pawn, White will soon create his second passed pawn on the queenside.

44...♙e3 45.e6 ♙c1 46.a4 bxa4 47.♙e5

Black resigned.

1-0

Even though there was no big difference in pawn structure – if anything the black pawns were a little more advanced – the white pieces had more active squares available. This meant that the position closely resembled a space advantage: Black needed to exchange pieces, while White needed to keep as many as possible.

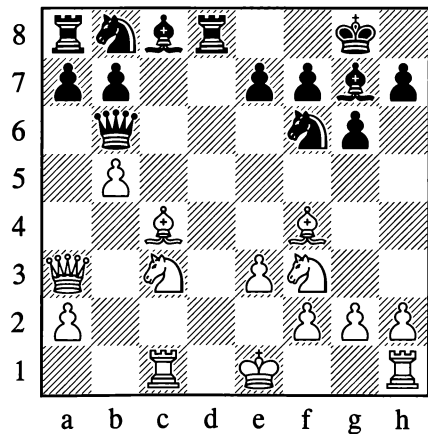
Playing with less Space

Playing with less space requires the exact opposite of what we've seen so far. The defender needs to exchange as many pieces as possible, be fast instead of taking his time, and be on the lookout for tactical opportunities to escape the bind.

Let's see how the best player of modern times handles positions with less space.

Vassily Ivanchuk – Magnus Carlsen

London 2013



At first glance, it seems that Black is not in a good position. He suffers from a lack of space and his queenside pieces are not developed yet, nor are his rooks connected.

13...♙e6!

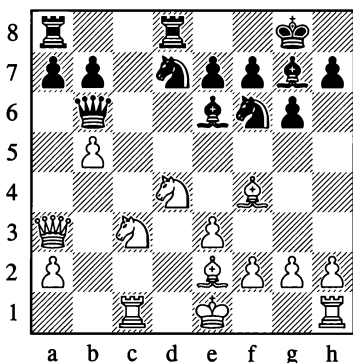
The right decision. The side with less space should try to exchange pieces in order to untangle.

After 13...e6? 14.0-0 Black's position would be strategically lost, as it is not clear how he could solve his development problems.

14.♙xe6

If White had avoided the exchange, Black could have solved all his problems:

14.♙e2 ♖bd7 15.♘d4



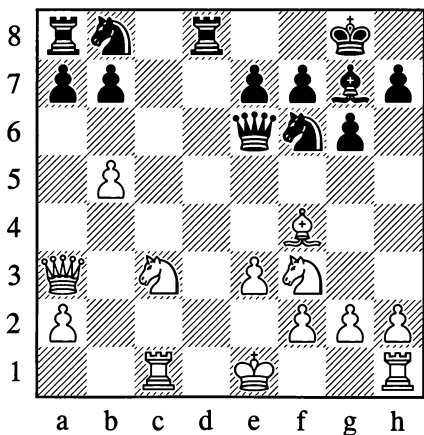
15...♙c5! 16.♙xc5

After 16.♙b2? ♘h5 suddenly, Black's pieces would become very active. Always keep in mind that placing many pieces in one line can give tactical possibilities to the opponent. Note for example the a1-h8 diagonal here.

16...♘xc5

With equality.

14...♙xc6



15.0-0

Another option was:

15.♘g5 ♙c4

Preventing White from castling, and the position becomes extremely concrete:

16.e4

Threatening ♘c3-d5.

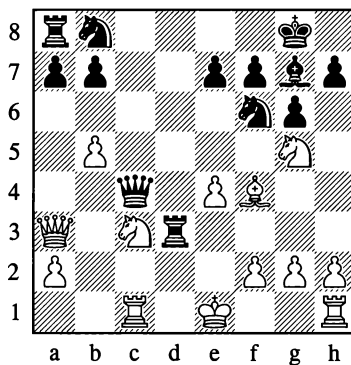
16.♘ce4 would force the continuation:

16...♙xb5 17.♙xe7 ♙a5† 18.♙f1 ♙b5†

19.♙e1 ♙a5† 20.♙f1 ♙b5† 21.♙g1

Otherwise, the game would end in perpetual check. 21...♙d7! With equality. The weakness of White's back rank comes to Black's aid.

16...♙d3



17.♘b1

17.♙xe7 would be met by: 17...♙xc3

18.♙xc3 ♙xc3† 19.♙d2 ♙a1† 20.♙e2

♙xa2 Defending the f7-pawn. 21.♙xb7

♙c4† 22.♙e1 h6! 23.♙xa8 ♙xb5 24.♘f3

♙h7 Black has enough compensation for the material deficit.

17...♙xb5 18.♙c8† ♙f8 19.♙xe7 ♖bd7

20.♙xf7† ♙h8

With a wild, complicated position.

15...♘bd7?!

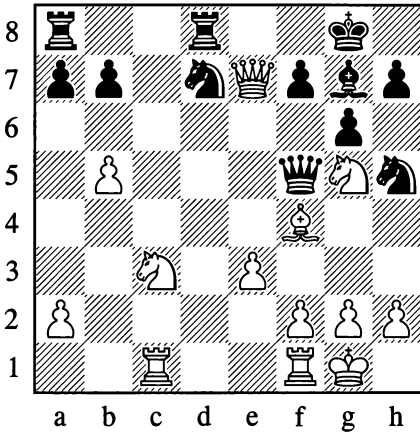
A risky move. By sacrificing a pawn, Carlsen seeks the initiative.

15...♙f8 would be enough for equality:

16.e4 ♖bd7 17.♙fd1 ♘h5 18.♙e3 ♘e5

19. ♖xe5 ♜xe5 Black has managed to exchange two minor pieces, meaning his position doesn't feel as cramped anymore.

16. ♖g5 ♜f5 17. ♜xe7 ♖h5



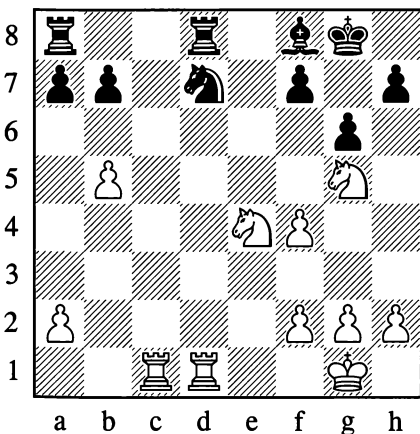
18. ♜fd1!

Ivanchuk is not afraid of exchanging his f4-bishop and increases his initiative by bringing the rook into action.

18... ♖xf4 19. exf4 ♖f8

In the event of 19... ♜xf4?? 20. ♖d5 ♜f5 White would win with a beautiful trick: 21. ♜xd8+! ♜xd8 22. ♖e7+ ♖f8 23. ♖xf5 With a winning position.

20. ♜e4 ♜xe4 21. ♖cxe4



21... ♖b6 22. g3 ♜xd1+ 23. ♜xd1 ♖e7

White has an advantage. He is a pawn up but, due to the doubled white f-pawns, Black has significant drawing chances. Carlsen eventually got away with a draw in a wild endgame.

...½–½

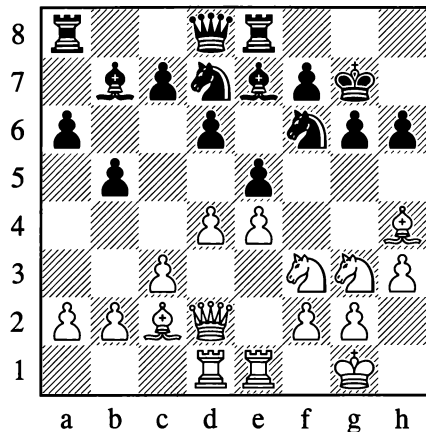
Even if Carlsen's decision to sacrifice a pawn was objectively questionable, all in all, his approach to the game was pitch-perfect. He tried to exchange pieces, and he did not settle for passive defence. He was on the lookout for tactical chances to activate his forces, and he jumped on the first one he saw possible. It is much better to err on the side of activity over material, and not the other way round. The next example is similar.

Before seeing the next game, let us mention the late chess genius, Vugar Gashimov, who besides being extremely strong, was also a very kind gentleman. Unfortunately, the chess world lost him way too soon.

Vugar Gashimov – Magnus Carlsen

Nanjing 2010

1. e4 e5 2. ♖f3 ♖c6 3. ♖b5 a6 4. ♖a4 ♖f6 5. 0–0 ♖e7 6. ♜e1 b5 7. ♖b3 d6 8. c3 0–0 9. h3 ♖b8 10. d4 ♖bd7 11. ♖bd2 ♖b7 12. ♖c2 ♜e8 13. ♖f1 ♖f8 14. ♖g5 h6 15. ♖h4 ♖e7 16. ♖g3 g6 17. ♜d2 ♖g7 18. ♜ad1

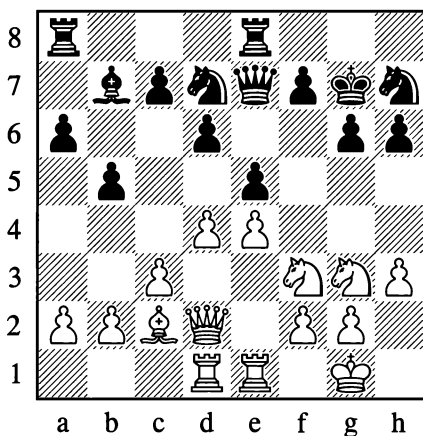


Having a considerable spatial advantage, White has a better position. Carlsen tries to slowly get rid of the pressure.

18...♘h7

Black's central pawns are all on dark squares, so he forces the exchange of his bad dark-squared bishop for the opponent's good one and, at the same time, he gets some breathing room.

19.♙xe7 ♖xe7



20.dxe5?!

Releasing the tension like this is usually a mistake in these structures and this is no exception. By taking on e5 White relinquishes most of his space advantage, as the d4-pawn was what provided him with it. Of course, a grandmaster of Gashimov's calibre would never play an anti-positional move without reason. As we'll see in the game, he planned to continue concretely, posing tactical problems that even Magnus Carlsen was unable to solve 100% correctly. However, the fact remains that with correct play Black could have equalized completely.

Anish Giri pointed out in his annotations that h3-h4 was interesting but did not amount to anything special: "The favourite Kasparov

method: 20.h4!? deserves some attention, though I don't think the pawn alone can trouble the black king so much. For example, 20...♘hf6 (20...h5 is weakening the g5 square for later) 21.h5 and White is sort of having some pressure on g6, but I think without the dark-squared bishop it is really hard to create any attack."

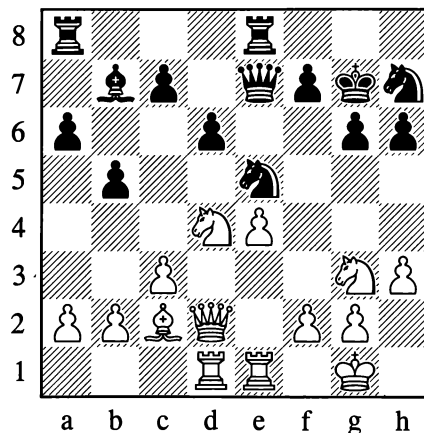
In fact, the best strategy for White would be to play a small improving move, keeping the tension. For example, a good idea would be to start with 20.b3!, hinting at a future d4-d5 and c3-c4 gaining even more space. White is not committed to that course of action though; the main point is that he stays flexible, enjoying his space advantage.

20...♘xe5

Black was forced to take this way, as taking with the pawn would hang the knight on d7. If ...dxe5 was available, Gashimov would never take on e5 anyway, as that would mean exchanging the d4-pawn with the d6-pawn, and only Black could ever benefit from that sort of exchange.

21.♘d4

The justification of White's previous move, keeping pieces on the board and introducing the deadly threat of ♘f5†.



21...♖g5!

Defending against the threat by tactical means. Now that Black got some temporary activity, he tries to make the most of it and extinguish White's advantage completely.

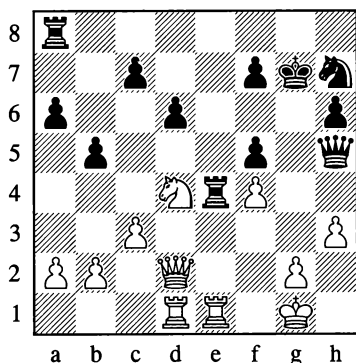
22.♘g5†

In the event of 22.♖xg5 hxg5, all of Black's problems would be solved.

22...gxf5 23.f4 ♘c4?

Carlsen commits a mistake which could have cost him the game.

A better continuation was: 23...♘f3†! 24.♘xf3 ♖h5 25.♘d4 ♕xe4 26.♕xe4 ♖xe4



Now if 27.g4, then 27...♖xe1† 28.♖xe1 fxg4 29.♖g2 ♖g8 30.hxg4 ♖c5 with a complicated battle ahead.

24.fxg5 ♘xd2 25.♘xf5† ♔f8 26.♖xd2 hxg5

White has an advantage due to the strong f5-knight and Black's kingside weaknesses, although Carlsen managed to eventually salvage a draw out of this bad position.

...½-½

Carlsen had the same approach here, as the one we saw in the previous game. Exchanging pieces, coupled with quick and tactically alert play, can save the day. However, even the world's strongest player sometimes falters

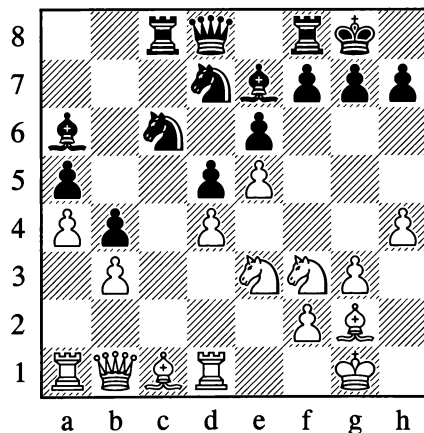
when faced with a dangerous attack against his king. Maybe, 20.dxe5 wasn't really a mistake from a practical point of view.

The player having more space has usually pushed his pawns further, meaning the "base" of his pawn chain is normally more exposed. That is a typical thing to take advantage of when playing with less space.

Radoslaw Wojtaszek – Magnus Carlsen

Krasnaya Polyana 2021

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♕g2 ♕e7 5.♘f3 0-0 6.0-0 a5 7.♖c2 c6 8.♘bd2 b6 9.e4 ♕b7 10.♖d1 ♘a6 11.e5 ♘d7 12.cxd5 ♘b4 13.♖b1 cxd5 14.♘f1 ♕a6 15.♘e3 ♖c8 16.a3 ♘c6 17.b3 b5 18.h4 b4 19.a4

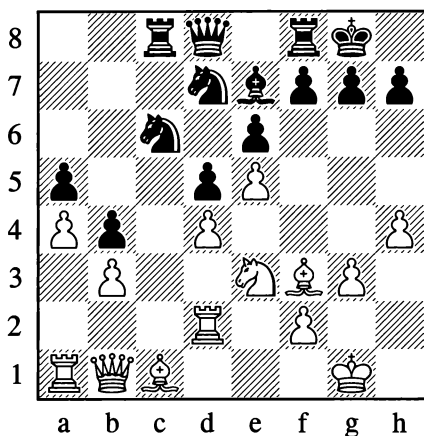


White has a space advantage and the prospect of a kingside attack, so it would be in Black's interest to exchange some pieces. Carlsen, who is also looking to undermine White's centre, first removes the main defender of the central d4- and e5-squares with a clever exchange.

19...♕e2!

An immediate 19...f6 would be premature: 20.exf6 ♕xf6 21.♖a2 ♖e8 22.♖ad2 With equal chances.

20.♖d2 ♕xf3 21.♕xf3



21...f6!

This is the right moment for this standard lever. The white pieces are uncoordinated and not ready for an open game, while the fact that White has already weakened his kingside with h2-h4 is also beneficial for Black.

22.♕g4!

The best response. Wojtaszek decides to complicate things by using tactical means.

After 22.exf6?! ♜xd4! 23.♖xd4 ♕xf6 24.♖f4 (in the event of 24.♖d1 ♕xa1 25.♖xa1 ♖xf3 Black would be totally winning) 24...♕xa1 25.♖xa1 ♖xf4 26.gxf4 ♖xh4 27.♜g2 ♖h3 White's uncoordinated pieces and his weak pawn structure, combined with Black's control of the open c-file, would give Black a pleasant advantage.

22...f5

Carlsen accepts the challenge.

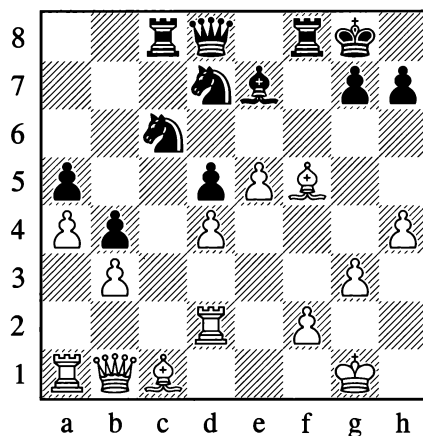
22...fxe5 23.♕xe6† ♜h8 24.♕b2 would lead to approximate equality.

23.♜xf5!?

Wojtaszek wisely refuses to back down.

23.♕h3?! is worse in view of: 23...♕xh4! 24.♕b2 (In case of 24.gxh4? ♖xh4 White's central pawns would soon fall and, due to White's weak king, Black would be completely winning.) 24...♖g5! (24...♕e7 25.♜xd5! exd5 26.♕xf5 gives White enough compensation.) 25.♖d3 ♖g6 Black has an extra pawn in this closed position and, with a bad bishop on b2, it would be difficult for White to find adequate compensation.

23...exf5 24.♕xf5



24...♕xh4!?

Carlsen decides to respond actively.

However, the following continuation would have been better: 24...♜h8! 25.♜g2 (25.♕xh7 ♕xh4! would be strong, and if 26.gxh4? ♜cx5! 27.dxe5 ♜xe5, Black's attack would be unstoppable.) 25...♖e8! White's compensation would be questionable.

After 24...h6 25.♕e6† ♜h8 26.♕xd5 ♖b6 27.♖e4 the game would be very complicated, and Black would probably be forced to sacrifice back a piece sooner or later anyway.

25.gxh4?

This mistake could have cost White the game.

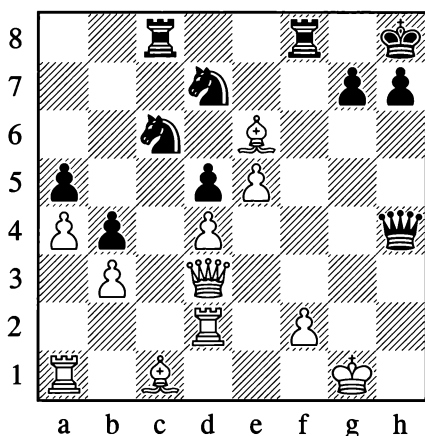
After 25.♖d1! ♖h8 26.♔g2! planning ♕e3 and ♖h1, White would have enough compensation.

25...♞xh4!?

Carlsen returns the favour!

He could have obtained a larger advantage by a beautiful knight sacrifice: 25...♘dx5! 26.dxe5 ♘xe5 27.♔g2 (27.♕xc8 ♘f3† 28.♖f1 ♞xh4 29.♕f5 ♖e8 leaves the white king trapped in a mating net.) 27...♞xh4! 28.♕xc8 ♞g5† 29.♖f1 ♘f3 30.♕e6† ♖h8 31.♕xd5 ♘xd2† 32.♕xd2 ♞xd2 Despite having one extra piece, White has not prevented the demise of his king.

26.♕e6† ♖h8 27.♞d3



27...♘dx5!?

It is a little late for this blow and it is not as strong as before.

A better continuation was:

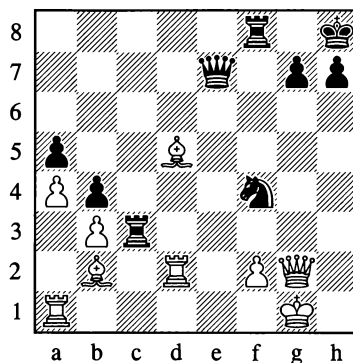
27...♞e7! 28.♕xd5?

28.♕g4 is the lesser evil but a powerful reply is: 28...♘dx5! 29.dxe5 ♘xe5 30.♞h3 ♖c3! Dragging the white queen to a worse position. 31.♞g2 ♖c6! Black's initiative is close to decisive.

The text move looks natural but it gives Black a chance to carry out a familiar sacrifice:

28...♘cxe5! 29.dxe5 ♘xe5 30.♞g3 ♖c3

31.♞g2 ♘d3 32.♕b2 ♘f4



33.♞e4

33.♞g4? loses more quickly to 33...h5! followed by a decisive queen check on g5.

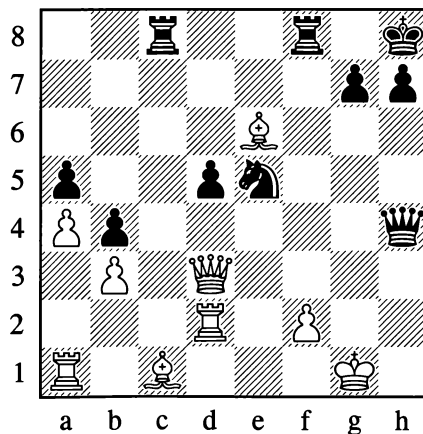
33...♞g5† 34.♖f1 ♘h5!

In the heat of battle, unexpected knight moves are very annoying!

35.♖e2 ♖xf2†! 36.♖xf2 ♞xd2†

Black is winning.

28.dxe5 ♘xe5

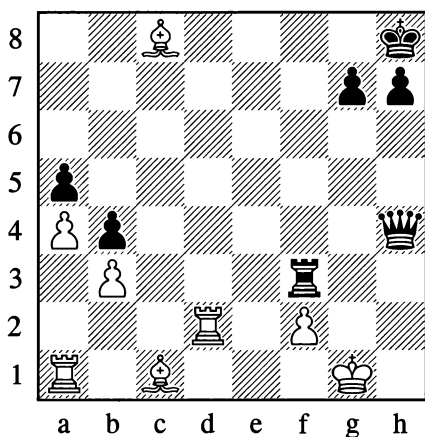


29.♞xd5!

White prepares to give up his queen in return for some of Black's attacking pieces.

29...♘f3† 30.♞xf3 ♖xf3 31.♕xc8

White has a lot of material for the queen and he only needs to stabilize.



31...Rf8

31...h6 would be a better try, although 32.♙b7 ♜xb3 33.♙g2 ♜f6 34.♜aa2 ♜b1 35.♜ac2 ♜e6 (but not 35...b3?? 36.♜c8† ♙h7 37.♙e4† when White wins) 36.♙f1 b3 37.♜c5 would result in equality.

32.♙b7 ♜f6 33.♜da2 ♜f7 34.♙g2 ♜xb3 35.♙e3 ♜d8

White has connected all his pieces, but the position is unclear due to Black's dangerous b-pawn. The players agreed to a draw.

½-½

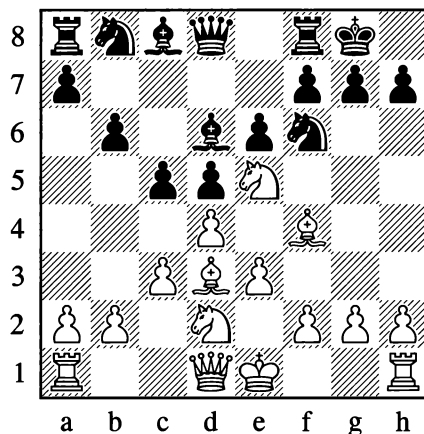
Removing the defender from the base of the pawn chain gave Carlsen the chance to chip away at White's centre with great effect, and that's a useful trick to remember. It can be used in all kinds of structures, where the base of the pawn chain is exposed.

There are also many openings that showcase the relationship between space and exchanging pieces.

Anton Demchenko – Wesley So

Khanty-Mansiysk 2019

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♙f4 e6 4.e3 ♙d6 5.♘bd2 0-0 6.♙d3 b6 7.♘e5 c5 8.c3



In openings like the Stonewall, Colle, Torre, and London, which have almost the same pawn structure, White's strong light-squared bishop plays a vital role in the game, so Black should seek a way to exchange it.

8...♙a6

By exchanging these bishops, Black not only gets rid of his bad bishop but also creates more space for his other pieces.

It is a good time to address the elephant in the room: Why are we talking about White having a space advantage? Isn't Black's structure slightly more advanced, with his c-pawn being on c5 while White's remains on c3?

Well, that would be the case if we narrow our perspective regarding space advantage to the classical definition which only takes pawn structures into account. However, if you paid attention to the game So – Firouzja, which we examined earlier in this chapter, even if the pawn structure is almost identical the position can resemble a space advantage.

In this specific case, the active bishop on f4 combined with the e5-knight guarantee that White's pieces have many more active squares at their disposal compared to their black counterparts. This statement places us firmly into space advantage territory. At the same time, Black needs to be careful about a possible quick attack against his castled king. These two factors put exchanging as many pieces as possible firmly on top of Black's agenda.

9.♙xa6 ♜xa6 10.h4!?

Having more space and controlling the centre, White tries to launch a kingside attack.

Another option was: 10.♙g5 ♜b8 11.0-0 ♙e7 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.c4 h6 14.♙h4 ♜fd7! Following the principle: less space, more exchanges! 15.♙xe7 ♜xe7 16.♜df3 ♜b6 17.♝c1 ♝c8 18.♞c2 ♜8d7 and Black was OK in Dubov – Grischuk, Internet (blitz) 2022.

10...♞c7!

A strong preparatory move. By defending the bishop on d6, Black prepares ...♜d7 which would further his goal of exchanging as many pieces as possible.

10...♜d7?? would be a blunder, due to 11.♜xf7 ♝xf7 12.♙xd6 and White would be winning.

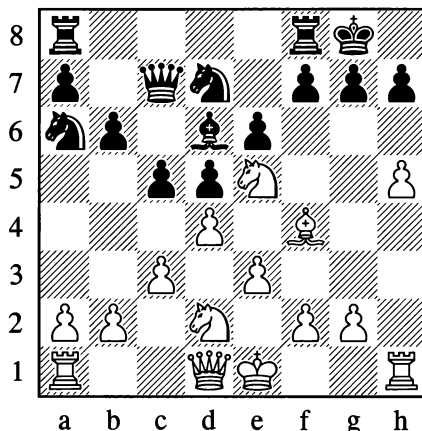
11.h5!

White continues his strategy.

11...♜d7?!

Black should have first prevented White's h-pawn from advancing further with 11...h6, followed by exchanging the e5-knight with ...♜d7, or improving the position of his a6-knight, either with ...♜b8-c6 or with ...cxd4 and ...♜c5!, exposing the fact that the e5-knight would be hanging.

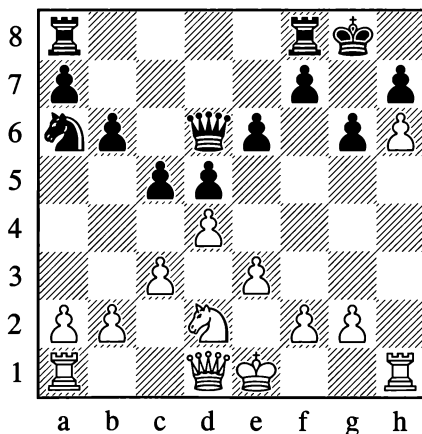
The typical trick with ...♜c5 we just mentioned will be used again in this book, so try to remember it!



12.h6!

White obtains more space on the kingside and weakens the dark squares around Black's king.

12...g6 13.♜xd7 ♜xd7 14.♙xd6 ♜xd6



Black managed to exchange off White's better-placed pieces, relieving most of the pressure. The position no longer resembles a space advantage, as the white pieces that guaranteed more squares with their activity are no more. On the other hand, White has

managed to put his h-pawn on h6 which, as modern practice has shown time and time again, can be very annoying.

15. ♖e2

The tempo on the a6-knight is not very relevant. Black had to move the knight soon anyway, as it is badly placed on a6.

15.0–0 would be better: 15...cxd4 16.cxd4 ♜fc8 17.♞a4 ♞c7 18.♞fc1 With some pressure.

15... ♞b8 16. ♞d1 cxd4 17. exd4 ♞c6 18. ♞f3 f6 19.0–0 ♞ae8

Maybe White is still a little better, but Black doesn't have any serious problems either. The game eventually ended in a draw.

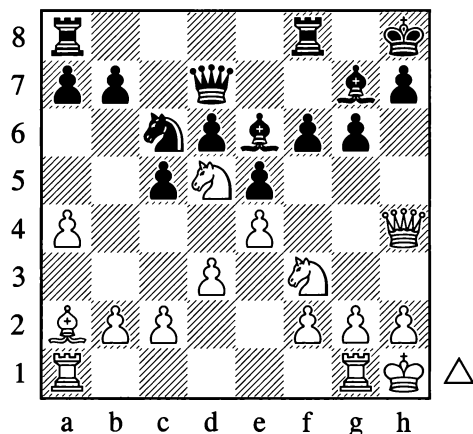
...½–½

It wasn't only a disparity in space that gave So the hint that he needed to exchange as many pieces as possible. The plausible attack against his king also played a crucial role in that assessment. Nevertheless, this was another useful example of challenging the main narrative regarding the way we perceive space advantage. Remember: it doesn't always come down to the pawn structure!

Sometimes, the player having less space tries to exchange some pieces, specifically because he needs them to go away before achieving his freeing pawn break.

Stelios Halkias – Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu

Terme Catez 2022



17.g4?

A premature decision. Having more space, White is trying to attack on the kingside. However, he has neglected Black's next move.

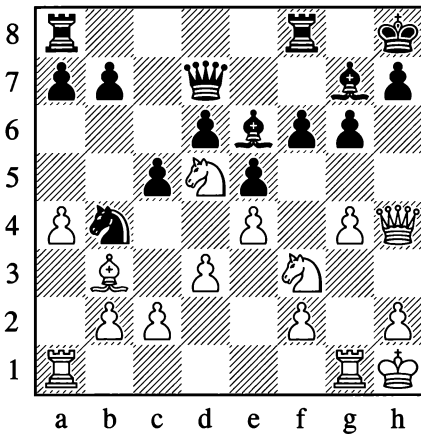
He should have first prevented the opponent's counterplay with 17.c3, with an unclear game.

17... ♞b4!

Black immediately takes advantage of White's neglect. In addition to exchanging pieces, he tries to reduce White's control over the vital d5-square.

18. ♞b3

18. ♞xb4 cxb4 19. ♞xe6 ♞xe6 transposes to the game continuation.



18...♞f7!

Another precise move. Black forces the opponent to trade off the knights. This is important, as Black needs to look for counterplay in the centre after White has launched an attack on the kingside with g2-g4. With the knights and light-squared bishops off the board, Black can eventually break in the centre with ...d6-d5.

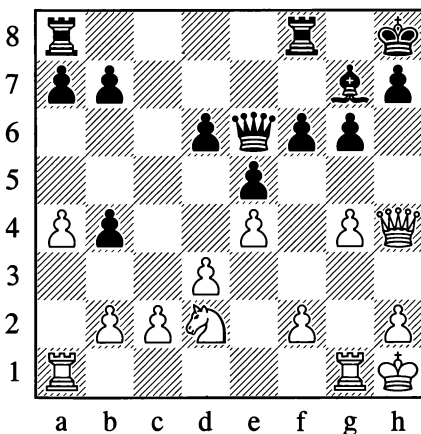
19.♠xb4

White had no choice.

19...cxb4 20.♙xe6 ♞xe6

Not only is Black ready to play the freeing ...d6-d5 move, but the white c2-pawn is also weakened.

21.♠d2



21...d5!

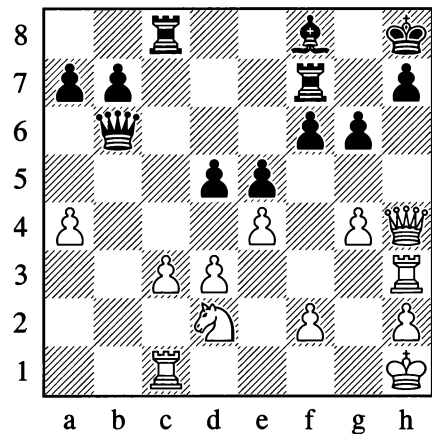
Black finally achieves his goal.

22.♞g3 ♞f7 23.♞c1 ♞c8

A simple and strong move. White's rook on c1 is tied down to the defence of the c-pawn.

24.c4 bxc3 25.bxc3 ♞b6 26.♞h3 ♙f8

White's attack on the kingside is getting nowhere. The f7-rook safely guards the h7-pawn, while at the same time keeping an eye on the b7-pawn.



27.♞b1

27.exd5?? is a blunder, as 27...♞b2 28.♞d1 ♞c2 wins for Black.

27...♞c6

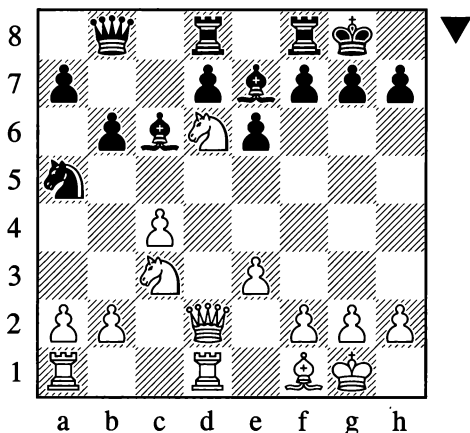
Black is much better. White has a lot of weaknesses that can be easily targeted, while the black king remains perfectly safe. Nisipeanu eventually won after a long struggle. ...0-1

Of course, having less space can be counter-balanced by other positional long-term factors. In the following game, for example, Black is cramped but has the two bishops. The two bishops are a "more permanent" advantage than space, even though both should be categorized as "long-term", and Black will use

that to his advantage. To better understand this, one can ponder the question: is it easier to gain space, or to hunt down and exchange a bishop?

Lampros Giannoulakis – Alexander Donchenko

Terme Catez 2022



Black suffers from a lack of space and his pieces have hardly any breathing room. However, Black's bishop pair is an important factor, and if Black manages to free himself by some exchanges he can even play for an advantage.

18...♗b7!

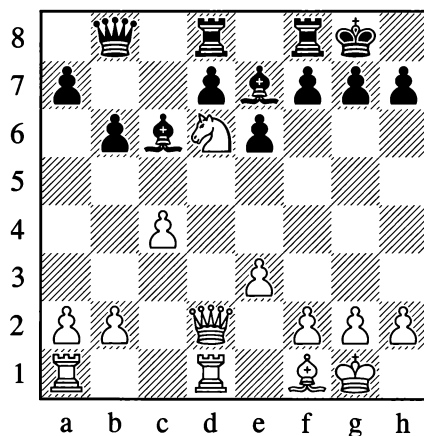
Black offers the exchange of knights in the first steps of his plan. For the moment, Black is not interested in giving up his two-bishop advantage.

After 18...♗b7?! 19.♖xd6 ♖xd6 20.♞xd6 ♗b7 21.♞d4 White is slightly better, as Black has nothing to compensate for his lack of space.

19.♗cb5?!

White should have avoided the exchange with: 19.♗db5 ♗c5 (Black can also play a small, improving move with something like 19...h6, when White has nothing better than 20.♗d4 ♗c5 21.♗xc6 dxc6 22.♖c2, leading to a balanced game with a symmetrical position and opposite-coloured bishops.) 20.♗d4 ♗a8 Keeping the bishop. 21.b4 ♗e4 22.♗xe4 ♗xe4 23.♞ac1 Black has only a slight edge.

19...♗xd6 20.♗xd6



20...f5!

Black advances his f-pawn to gain space on the kingside and activate the f8-rook.

21.a4

White is playing on the queenside, where he has a pawn majority.

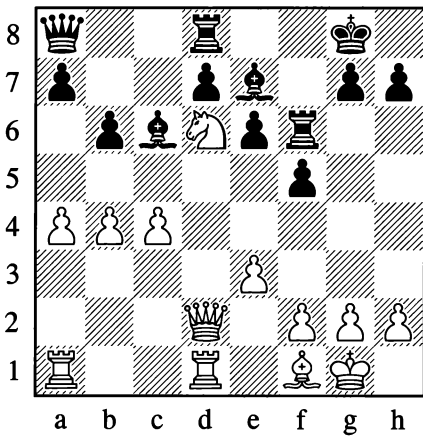
21...♞f6

The useful prophylactic move 21...a5!? is also interesting.

22.b4 ♖a8?

Black mistakenly places his queen on the same file as the opponent's rook.

22...♞g6 would be correct, with ...h7-h5 to follow.



23.g3?!

Afraid of the opponent's attack, White misses an opportunity to obtain counterplay on the queenside.

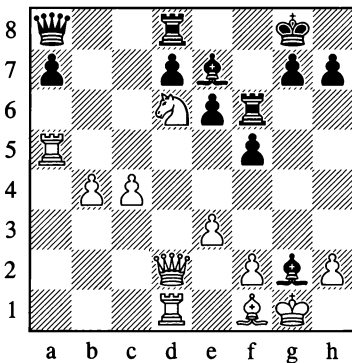
Better was seeking immediate counterplay with:

23.a5! bxa5

Or 23...♖b8 24.axb6 axb6 25.b5 ♔a8 26.♞a6 and suddenly White has gained a lot of counterplay.

24.♞xa5 ♔xg2!

This looks really scary, but a long forcing line follows:



25.♔xg2 ♞g6 26.f3 ♞xf3 27.♞f1!

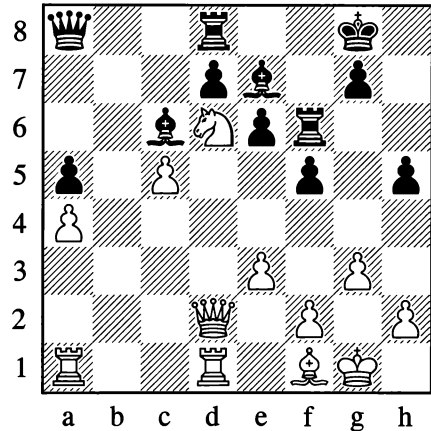
The only move, threatening the queen before Black has time to take the d6-knight. ♞xg2† 28.♞xg2 ♞xe3† 29.♞f2 ♞g5† 30.♞g3 ♞xg3† 31.hxg3 ♔xd6 32.c5 ♔xg3 33.♞xa7

With good practical chances for White who, due to the weakness of the d7-pawn, threatens to obtain two strong, connected passed pawns.

23...a5

Another option was 23...♔f3 24.♔e2 h5 with an unclear battle.

24.bxa5 bxa5 25.c5 h5



26.♞d4?

A careless move.

Controlling the open b-file would be better: 26.♞ab1 Simple chess! 26...h4 (26...♞g6 could be met by 27.♞b5! ♔xd6 28.♞xd6, when White would have obtained an advantage. Black should not dare to take the rook, due to the creation of a dangerous passed pawn on the b-file.) 27.♞b6 With a complicated game. White plans to continue with ♞a6 and ♔b5.

26...♞g6 27.♞ab1?

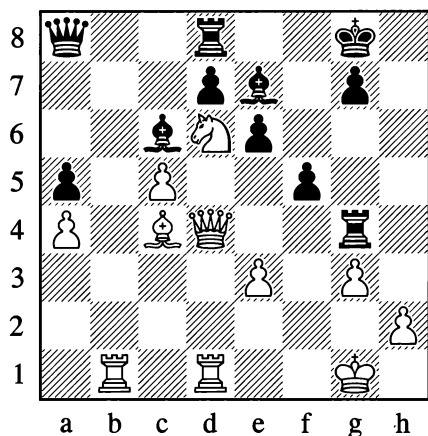
A serious mistake.

Because of his vulnerable king, White should have tried to exchange the queens, hoping to eliminate the opponent's attack on his king: 27.♞c4! A mix of two ideas, one tactical and one positional! White threatens both ♔xf5 and exchanging queens with ♞a6.

There could follow 27...♙d5 28.♖a6 ♜xa6 29.♙xa6 with equal chances. By trading off queens, White can take the sting out of Black's attack.

27...h4 28.♙c4 hxc3 29.fxc3 ♜g4

Now Black's initiative is decisive.



30.♖d3??

Making Black's task even easier.

30.♖c3 should have been played, although after 30...♙xa4 31.♘xf5 ♙f6 Black would be winning.

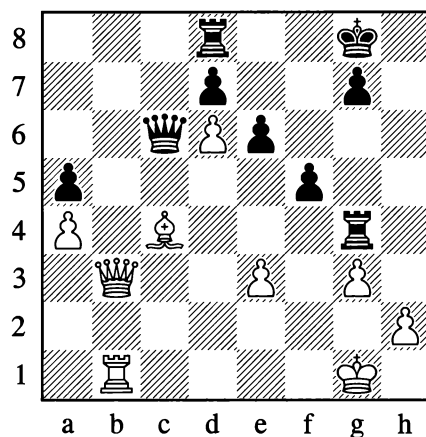
30...♙xd6!

It is time to part with the bishop pair for the greater good!

31.cxd6 ♙e4

The game is over.

32.♖b3 ♙xb1 33.♜xb1 ♖c6



34...♙xe6†

Desperation.

34...dxe6 35.♖xe6† ♙h8 36.♖xf5 ♖e4 37.♖h5† ♖h7 38.♖b5 ♜g6 39.♙d1 ♖h6 40.d7 ♖xe3† 41.♙g2 ♜e6 42.♖h5† ♙g8

White is a rook down without any compensation, so he resigned.

0-1

Black made excellent use of his pair of bishops, while White failed to prove that his space advantage was of any substantial value. It is also important to note how much easier it seemed to be to gain space by exchanging pieces (18...♘b7!) or pushing pawns (20...f5!), compared to hunting down one of Black's bishops which was nearly impossible.

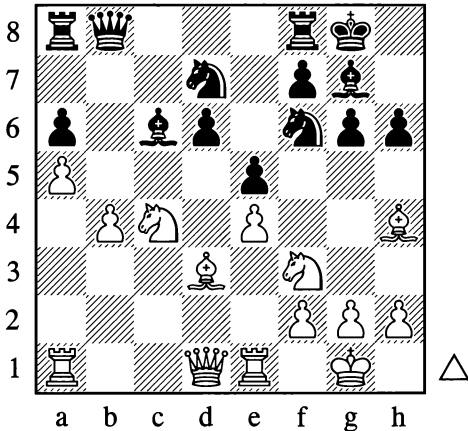
Exceptions to the Rules

It is important to keep in mind that the correct evaluation of a position depends on considering all its factors. Perhaps it can also be said that the defining attribute of a master is knowing when to break the normal principles. The subject of exchanges and their relation to space is no exception. Sometimes, one side with a space advantage voluntarily exchanges pieces to achieve other goals.

Let's look at some examples of this in action.

Amir Bagheri – Viktor Bologan

Corsica (rapid) 2005



White has a good advantage in space and there are a lot of weaknesses in Black's camp. However, it should be noted that the white pawn on b4 is now under attack and, in addition, Black is ready to play the freeing ...d6-d5 move.

18. ♖xf6!

Despite having a huge space advantage, White trades off his strong bishop for the opponent's knight, trying to exploit the opponent's weaknesses like the b6- and d5-squares and prevent Black from breaking free.

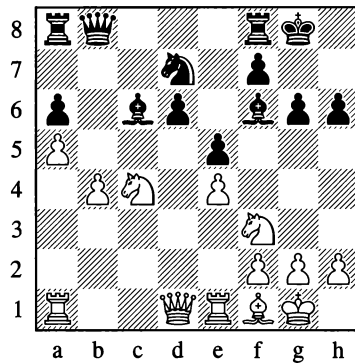
Attacking the d6-pawn immediately with 18. ♖c2? would allow Black to play 18...d5! 19. ♖xf6 dxc4 and he would obtain some counterplay.

18... ♜xf6

The alternative is:

18... ♖xf6 19. ♖f1!

Black is no longer able to play ...d6-d5, while the removal of the knight from f6 ensured that the e4-pawn is not hanging.



19... ♖xb4

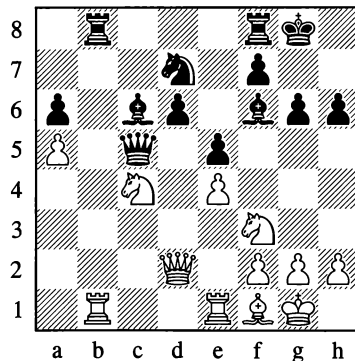
After 19... ♖b5 20. ♖d2 White's advantage would be clear.

Grabbing the b-pawn is critical, but White has a delightful way to refute it.

20. ♖b1!

20. ♖xd6 is the way to a small but safe advantage. The game would continue with 20... ♖xd6 21. ♜xd6 and White would be slightly better. His more active pieces and Black's weak pawn on a6 would make Black unable to completely balance out the game with his bishop pair.

20... ♖c5 21. ♖d2! ♖ab8

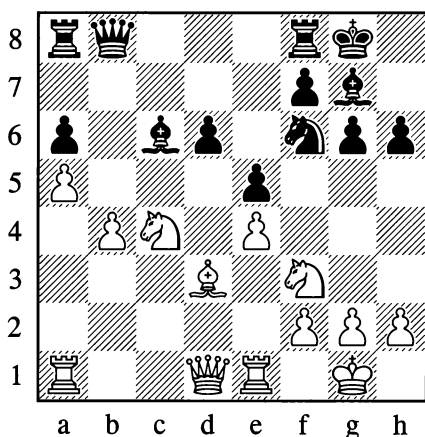


22. ♜b6!

The magnificent point of White's previous moves. White threatens ♖ec1.

22... ♜xb6 23. ♖bc1! ♖a3 24. ♖xc6 ♜c8 25. ♖xa6

With a winning position for White.



19. ♖b6 ♜a7 20. ♞c1 ♙b7 21. ♞b3!

White has a pleasant position. His pieces are more active than their counterparts, and he has a better pawn structure. Black eventually won, but it had nothing to do with the current position.

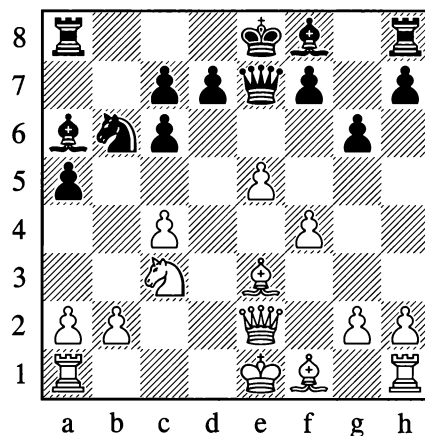
...0-1

It was much more important for White to stop Black from playing his freeing ...d6-d5 break than keeping one more piece on the board. By taking on f6 he granted himself the crucial tempo he needed to achieve that. The next game is quite similar:

Jorden van Foreest – Nigel Short

Malmö 2021

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘xc6 bxc6 6.e5 ♞e7 7.♞e2 ♘d5 8.c4
♘b6 9.♘c3 a5 10.f4 g6 11.♙e3 ♙a6



The e5-pawn gives White a spatial advantage, and Black is trying to free himself by breaking in the centre with his d-pawn.

12. ♙xb6!

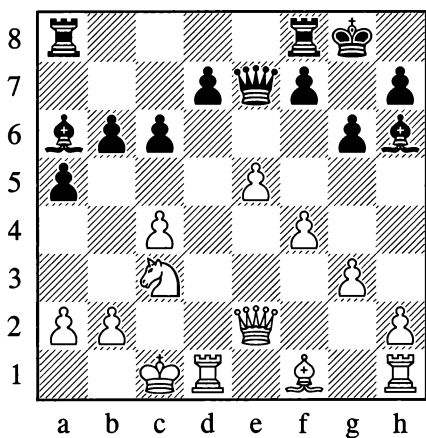
The Dutch GM shows his fine understanding by exchanging his powerful bishop for the enemy knight, aiming to prevent counterplay. It is very important for White to prevent his opponent from playing his levers with ...f7-f6, ...d7-d6 and ...d7-d5, when he would obtain counterplay.

For example, if 12.b3?, then 12...♙g7 13.♞d1 and Black would have the chance to chip away at White's centre with 13...f6.

12...cxb6 13.0-0-0

White enjoys a stable space advantage and he can put more pressure on Black's weaknesses along the d-file. Since Black is not easily able to open the position, his bishop pair will not play a significant role in the game.

13...♗h6 14.g3 0-0



15.h4!

Having more space, White tries to open a file on the kingside and provokes his opponent to create more weaknesses. When you have a spatial advantage and control of the centre, it is easier for you to play on the flank as well. On the other hand, this is an excellent prophylactic move and prevents Black from playing ...f7-f6 or ...g6-g5.

For example, after 15.♗g2 Black would hit the centre with 15...f6! and obtain counterplay.

15.♗h3 is not accurate either: 15...♖ad8! (After 15...d5 16.exd6 ♗xe2 17.♘xe2 ♗xc4 18.♘c3 ♗g7 19.♗g2 although Black would have the bishop pair, White's passed d-pawn and pressure on the queenside would give him the better game.) 16.♖he1 f6 Black obtains some counterplay.

15...♖ae8

15...f6?

This break does not work now:

16.exf6 ♗xf6

16...♗xe2 17.♗xe2 ♖xf6 (17...♖ad8 18.♖d6 would be completely winning for White.) 18.♖xd7 White would have a huge advantage because, in contrast with ♗g2 or ♗h3 on the

previous move, the c4-pawn here is defended by the bishop. In addition to the pawn up for White, all of Black's pieces are passive.

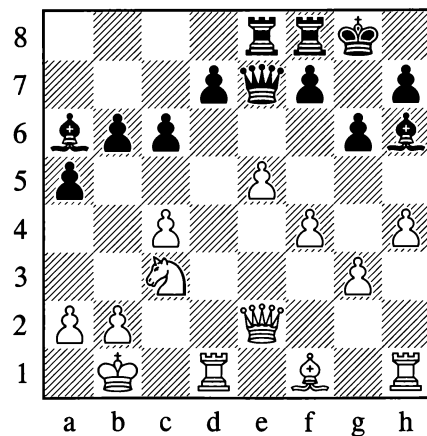
17.♘e4 ♗e7 18.♘d6 ♗xe2 19.♗xe2

White has a huge advantage. He has a monster knight on d6, Black's d7-pawn is weak, and the bishop on a6 is out of action. Black's queenside pawn majority is disabled, but White can still count on his own mobile majority on the kingside. Note also that White's knight on d6 controls the e8-square, thus preventing Black from fighting for the open e-file.

16.♗b1

White gets his king off the c1-h6 diagonal and intends to push his h-pawn to h5.

However, the immediate 16.h5! is stronger. After 16...g5 17.♗b1 White would have a huge advantage and in the event of 17...gxf4? 18.gxf4 the f4-pawn would be untouchable due to ♗g4†.

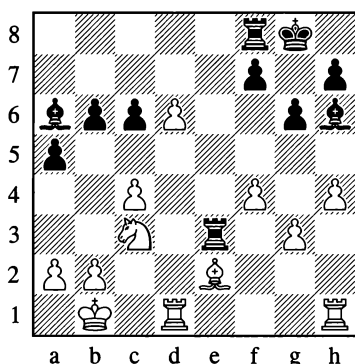


16...f6

Due to the opponent's attack on the kingside, Black cannot remain passive.

The other option was:

16...d6 17.exd6 ♗xe2 18.♗xe2 ♖e3



19. Re1! Bd8

Black has no time for 19... Rg3? on account of 20. d7 Bd8 21. c5! b5 (21... Qxe2 22. Bxe2 Qf8 23. Qe4 Bf3 24. Qf6 would leave Black completely helpless) 22. Qxb5! Qxb5 23. Be8+ and White wins.

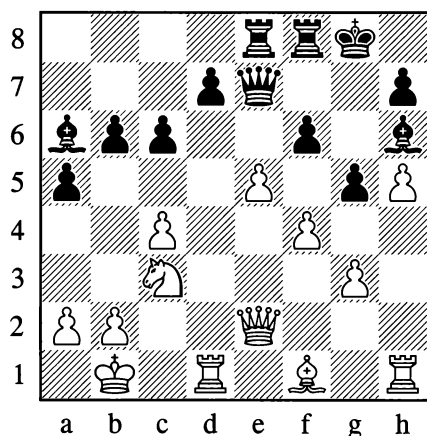
20. c5! Qxe2 21. Bxe2 Bxe2 22. Qxe2 bxc5 23. Qc2

White has a great advantage due to Black's vulnerable queenside pawns.

17. h5 g5?

A decisive mistake.

More stubborn resistance could be offered by: 17... fxe5! 18. hxxg6 Qg7 19. f5 hxxg6 20. Wh2 (20. fxg6 is not fast enough: 20... e4! 21. Wh2 Bf6 22. Wh7+ Qf8 23. Qe2 d5 With an extremely complicated position.) 20... Rxf5 21. Wh7+ Qf7 Black can continue fighting.



18. Qe4!

An elegant and instructive move that is quite a typical pattern in such positions.

18... fxe5

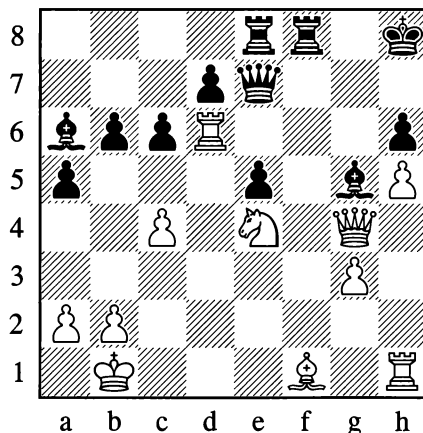
After 18... gxf4 19. Qxf6+ Wxf6 (19... Rxf6 20. Wg4+ wins for White) 20. exf6 Bxe2 21. Qxe2 Black would be an exchange down without any compensation.

19. fxg5 Qxg5 20. Wg4 h6 21. Bd6!

White does not allow his opponent to breathe.

In the event of 21. Bxd7?, Black would finally find his chance with 21... Qc8, and with all his pieces participating, he would even achieve a slight advantage.

21... Qh8



22. Qd3!

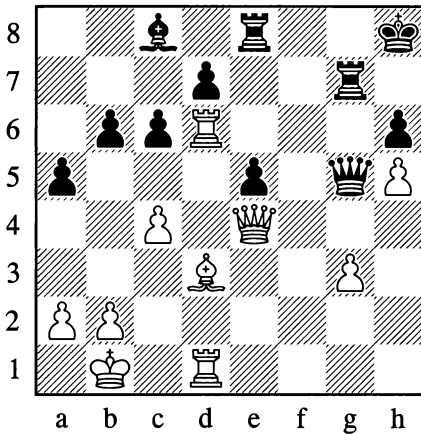
White's pieces volunteer themselves to the attack against the enemy king one after another.

You should again refrain from capturing the d7-pawn, which actually hampers Black by preventing the a6-bishop from coming into play. 22. Bxd7? would be answered by 22... Qc8, with counterplay. After 22. Wxd7? Wxd7 23. Bxd7 Qc8 24. Bd6 Qf5 Black would even get a slight advantage.

22...♙c8 23.♖d1 ♜g8 24.♘xg5

Clearing the e4-square for the queen.

24...♜xg5 25.♜e4 ♜g7



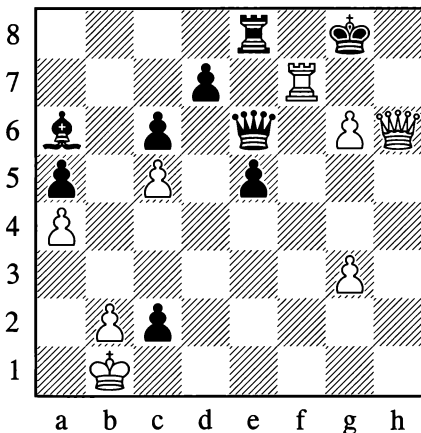
26.♜f1

White is practically a piece up and wins the game without any problems.

26...♙g8 27.c5! b5

Black would lose quickly after 27...bxc5? 28.♜f5 ♜e7 29.♙c4† ♙h8 30.♜xh6† ♜h7 31.♜xe5! and the defence finally crumbles.

28.a4 ♙a6 29.♜g6 ♜xg6 30.hxg6 ♜e7 31.♜f7 ♜e6 32.♜h4 b4 33.♙c2 b3 34.♜xh6! bxc2†



35.♙c1!

The black pawn on c2 is the best cover for the white king!

35...♜xf7 36.gxf7† ♙xf7 37.♜h5† ♙f8 38.♜f5† ♙g7 39.♜xd7† ♙f8 40.♜xc6

White is completely winning and eventually took home the full point.

...1-0

What an excellent game by GM Van Foreest, who never gave his formidable opponent a chance to untangle. Giving up his powerful e3-bishop for the “passive” b6-knight was, in its simplicity, a stroke of genius, that allowed him to permanently stop Black from achieving his desired pawn breaks.

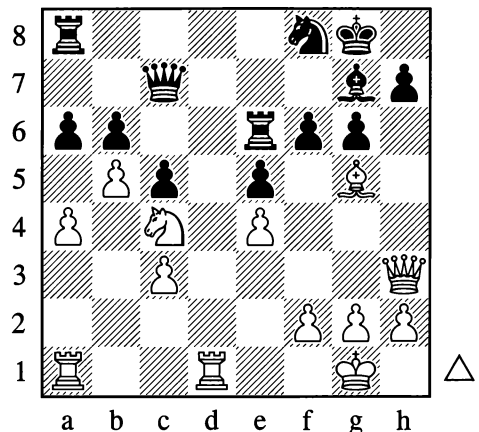
Checkmate over Space

What an obvious statement! However, some far-from-obvious decisions stem out of this obvious notion, that checkmate is more important than a space advantage.

The following is another example of trying to exchange, despite having more space. This time the goal is to weaken the opponent’s king, which we will discuss more deeply in the next chapter.

Amir Bagheri – Petr Jirovsky

Zagan 1997



22.♙h6!

A tough but correct decision. White has a space advantage and in addition, his bishop looks better than its counterpart. So, on the surface, the exchange of these bishops does not seem logical. But, as mentioned before, only what remains on the board matters. In fact, Black's bishop is the most important defender of his king and exchanging it will severely weaken his defences.

Even the experienced and great chess coach Alexey Kuzmin, who was the coach of the Iranian national team at that time, thought it was better to play 22.♙d2 due to White's space advantage.

22...♜e8 23.♞e3

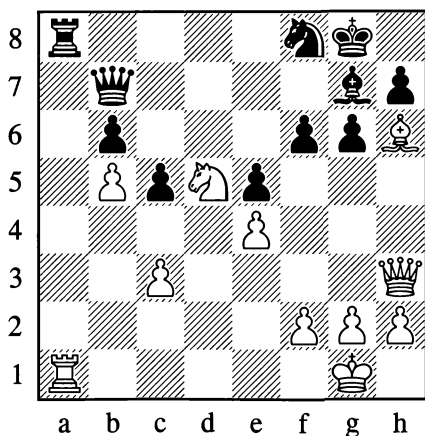
The knight relocates to the even more powerful d5-outpost.

23...axb5

This is logical: Black is trying to initiate as many exchanges as possible.

24.axb5 ♜xa1 25.♜xa1 ♞b7 26.♞d5

The white knight on d5 is a monster.

26...♜a8**27.♜d1!**

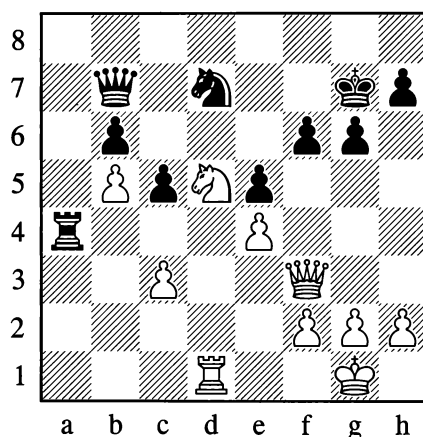
Having more space, White declines to exchange the rooks.

27...♜a4 28.♙xg7 ♖xg7

With the defending bishop removed, Black's king is vulnerable to an attack.

29.♞f3

But not 29.♞h4?!, due to 29...♞xd5! and Black would win a piece.

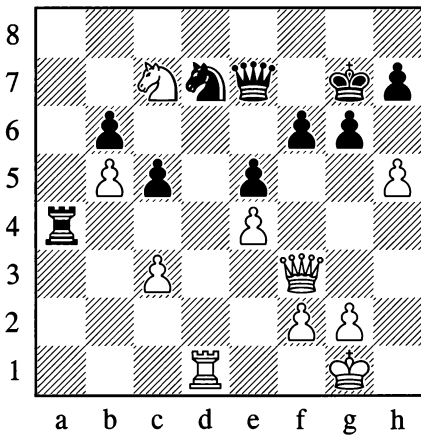
29...♞d7**30.h4!**

Now that the white pieces occupy their optimal squares, it is time to use a pawn for our mission to destroy the shelter of the black king.

30...♞c8 31.h5 ♞e8

In the event of 31...g5 32.h6† ♖xh6 33.♞xf6 Black's helpless king would leave him no other choice but to resign.

32.♞c7 ♞e7



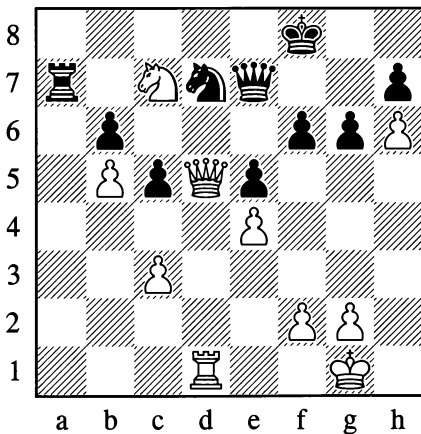
33.h6†!

The main point behind the previous move. The noose is tightening around Black's neck!

33...♖f7

33...♖xh6 just blunders a knight to 34.♖h3†.

34.♖d3 ♜a7 35.♖d5† ♖f8



36.♖c6

The white queen penetrates the opponent's camp, and the game is over.

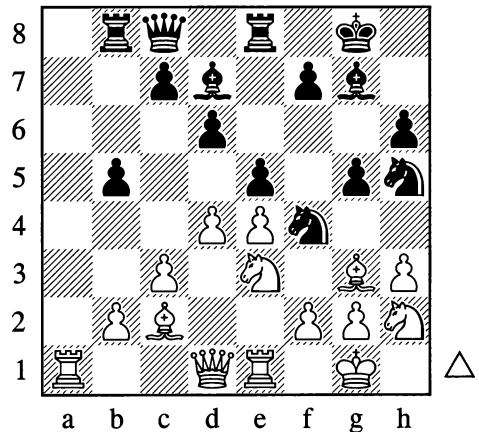
36...♜b8 37.♖xb6! ♜xc7 38.♖xf6† ♖e8 39.b6 1-0

A good game by White. Permanent advantages are nice, but we should not try to only “sit” on them. At some point we must do something concrete to get the full point, and here is a good time to repeat ourselves: remember that it is checkmate that ends the game! If it means getting the scalp of the opponent's king, we should of course exchange off defenders even if we have a space advantage.

In the next game, we will see a similar pattern: White exchanges some pieces despite having a space advantage but, in return, he gets a raging attack against the black king.

Pouya Idani – Vahap Sanal

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022



22.♜xf4!

A timely exchange by the strong Iranian grandmaster Pouya Idani. He is one of Iran's chess geniuses with whom GM Amir Bagheri has worked as a coach in the past.

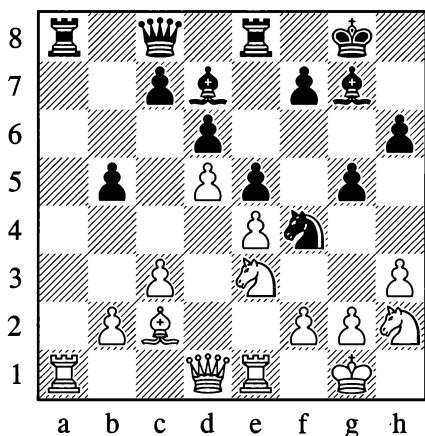
White fends off Black's attack, and soon takes over the initiative.

22...♜xf4

If 22...exf4 23.♖xh5 fxe3 24.♜xe3 White's advantage would be undeniable.

23.d5!

White gains more space in the centre and closes the position to disable the opponent's bishop pair. Black's dark-squared bishop is bad and the f5-square is weak.

23...♖a8**24.♖b1!?**

An understandable decision. Having more space, Pouya decides to avoid exchanging the rooks and leave the open a-file to his opponent. Remember what we said at the start of this chapter: a space advantage is directly correlated to better rooks!

However, the engine has a different opinion: after 24.♖xa8 ♜xa8 25.g3! ♘g6 (25...♘h3† 26.♔g2 traps the black knight) 26.♜h5 ♜a2 27.♖b1 b4 28.cxb4 ♖b8 29.♘hg4 White would have a decisive advantage.

24...f6?

A strange move that completely buries Black's dark-squared bishop.

24...h5 would have been a better choice.

25.g3 ♘g6

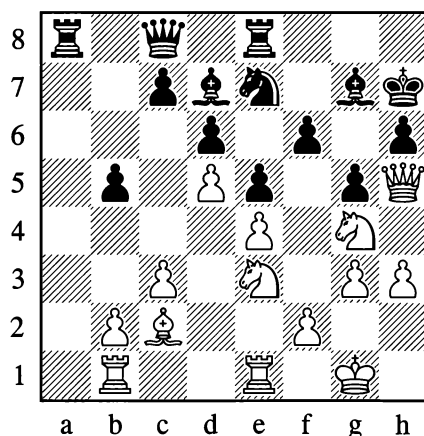
After 25...♘h3† 26.♔g2 the h3-knight is in a lot of trouble. White is threatening ♖h1 and ♘hg4, among others, and Black will be forced to play ...g5-g4 to extricate the knight through the g5-square. That would return the pawn he just captured and destroy the black structure at the same time.

26.♜h5 ♘e7 27.♘hg4

After warding off the opponent's attack, White now takes the initiative.

27...♔h7

After 27...♖f8 28.♘h6† ♔xh6 29.♜xh6 ♜e8 30.♖a1 White would be a pawn up, and Black would have a weak king and no compensation.

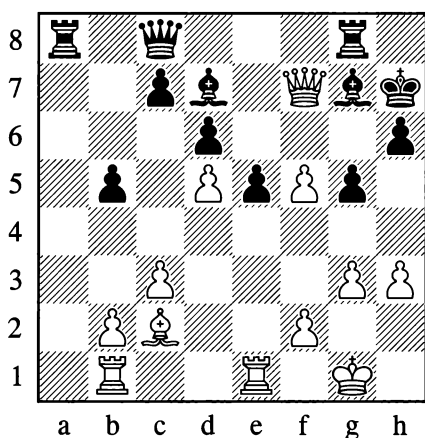
**28.♘xf6†!**

A beautiful combination.

28...♔xf6 29.♜f7† ♔g7 30.♘f5 ♘xf5

The white bishop also joins the attack.

31...♖g8



32. ♖g6+

Of course, not 32. f6+?? because of 32... ♗f5 and Black wins.

32... ♔h8 33. f6 e4 34. ♗xe4
1-0

A beautiful display of an attack, while having a space advantage.

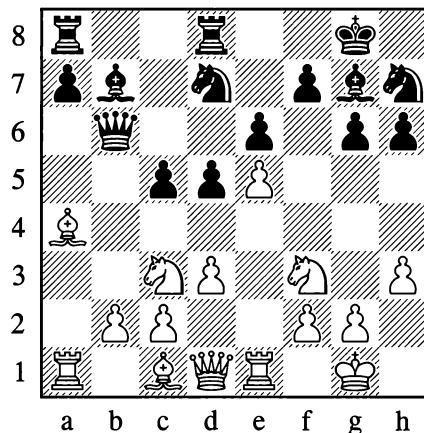
Overprotection

Overprotection is a positional concept which was for the first time introduced by Aron Nimzowitsch in his famous book *My System*. IM J. Silman also explains it very well in his book *Complete Book of Chess Strategies*: “Overprotection refers to a strategically important pawn or square that is given more protection than it seemingly needs. Essentially a prophylactic maneuver, the side that overprotects does so in order to dissuade the opponent from launching an attack against that point.”

Magnus Carlsen – Alexey Dreev

Tbilisi 2017

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. ♗b5+ ♘d7 4. a4 ♘gf6
5. ♘c3 g6 6. a5 ♗g7 7. a6 0-0 8. 0-0 e6 9. d3
♗b6 10. axb7 ♗xb7 11. ♖e1 ♖fd8 12. ♗a4 h6
13. h3 d5 14. e5 ♘h7



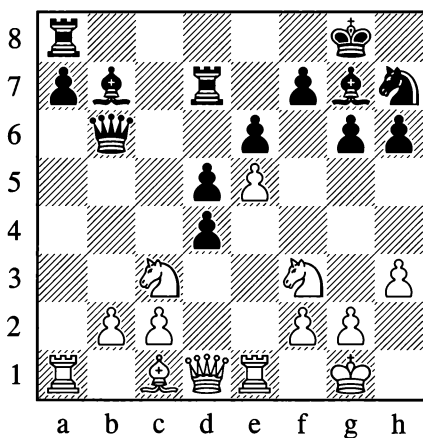
A very interesting position in which White's biggest asset is the pawn on e5. This pawn plays a key factor in such positions, as it single-handedly creates a space advantage on the centre and kingside. If White can neutralize Black's pressure on it, he will prevent the activity of the opponent's pieces.

15. ♗xd7!

A multi-purpose move. With this exchange, White reduces Black's pressure on the e5-pawn and prepares for the d3-d4 advance. The black knight on h7, which was supposed to move to f8 and maintain pressure on the e5-pawn (by defending the knight on d7), is now out of action and has no good prospects. This move also clears the a4-square for the knight on c3 to put pressure on the black c5-pawn. However, Carlsen does not follow this interesting plan in the game. In fact, it seems that Carlsen intended to just overprotect the e5-pawn, which cuts the board in half.

15...♖xd7 16.d4

As mentioned above, another interesting plan is to put pressure on the c5-pawn: 16.b3! intending ♗c1-a3 and ♘c3-a4.

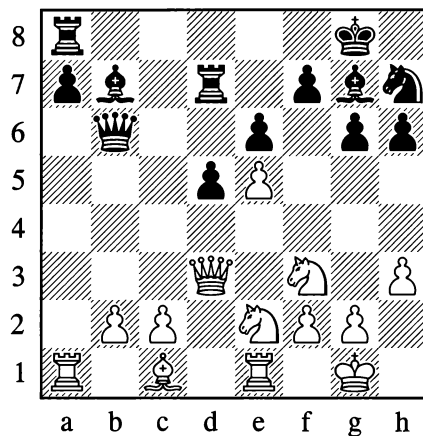
16...cxd4**17.♘e2!**

Carlsen, instead of rushing to take back on d4 with his perfectly placed f3-knight, intends to take back on d4 with what previously was a misplaced knight on c3. As you can see, this plan could only be implemented by removing the black knight from d7 as otherwise the e5-pawn would fall.

17...d3!

A great practical decision, that will be fully explained by Black's next move.

After 17...♘f8 18.♘exd4 a5 19.h4! with the idea of h4-h5, attacking on the kingside, White would have a great advantage. Note how useless the b7-bishop looks in such a scenario.

18.♖xd3**18...d4!**

By a pawn sacrifice, Black decides to open the long diagonal for his light-squared bishop and tries to complicate the game. This is practically forced, as otherwise White would put his knight on d4 and shut the bishop on b7 out of play. After that White's attack on the kingside would be decisive.

19.♘exd4 g5

Preparing ...♘h7-f8-g6.

20.c3

Despite Black's noble attempts, White ends up a healthy pawn up. Carlsen eventually won. ...1-0

We couldn't have finished this chapter without mentioning overprotection, as it is a concept closely related to space, as well as exchanges. Overprotecting usually refers to a pawn that grants us space, and to protect this pawn we need the right assortment of pieces. Overprotecting the pawn that grants us the space advantage is very often the way we can ensure its longevity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we witnessed the importance of the relationship between space and exchanges. We saw how important it is to keep pieces on the board when having a space advantage and talked about the influence of space on different types of pieces. Furthermore, we questioned the classic definitions of space in the games So – Firouzja and Demchenko – So.

We learnt how to deal with having less space, and when it is correct to go against the principle of keeping more pieces on the board. We saw instances where we should exchange despite having a space advantage in order to prevent a freeing move. We witnessed transformations of a space advantage to an attack. Finally, we noted the important concept of overprotection.

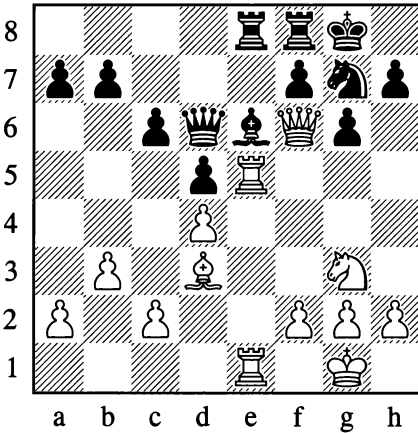
When trying to transform a space advantage to a full point, knowing which pieces to exchange, when and how, is very often the key to success.

Exercises

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So

Saint Louis 2021

2-1

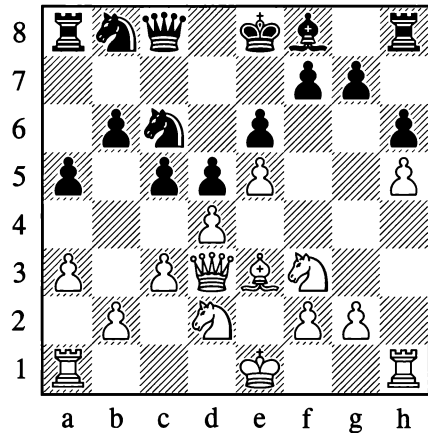


Black to play

Jorden van Foreest – Anthony Wirig

Chalons en Champagne 2021

2-3

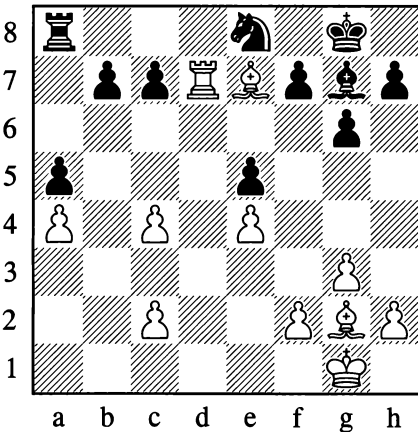


Black to play

Georg Meier – Jorden van Foreest

Karlsruhe 2020

2-2

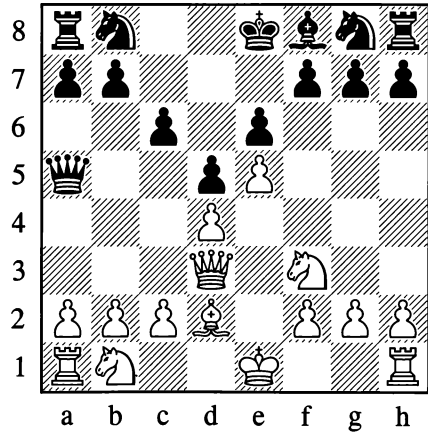


Black to play

Andre Oberhofer – Rustem Dautov

Germany 2017

2-4

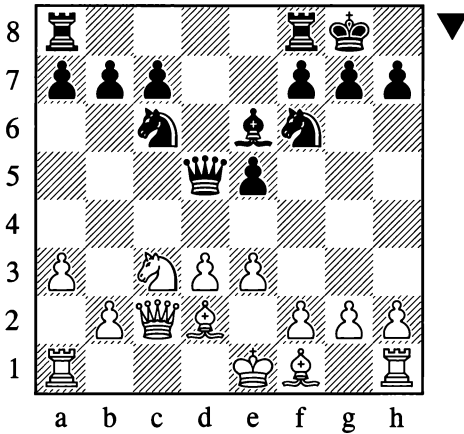


Black to play

Anton Korobov – Jorden van Foreest

Linares 2020

2-5

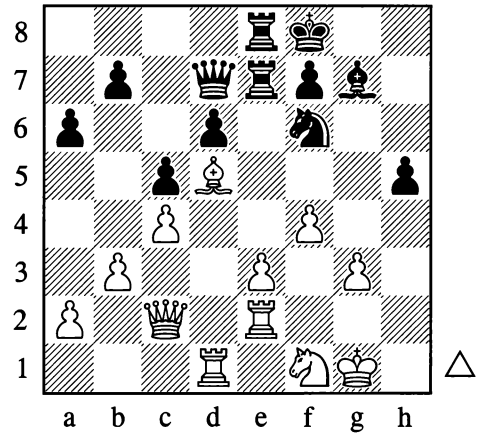


Black to play

Amir Bagheri – Aloyzas Kveinys

Paris 2004

2-7

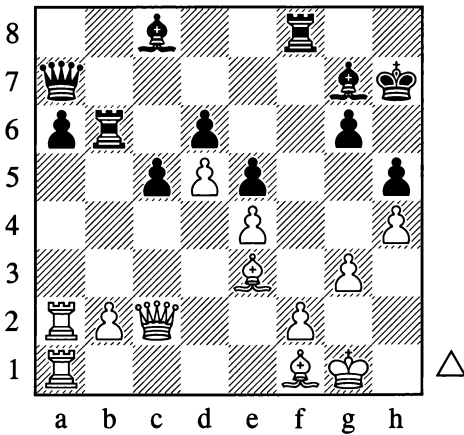


White to play

Arjun Erigaisi – David Shahinyan

Tsaghkadzor 2021

2-6

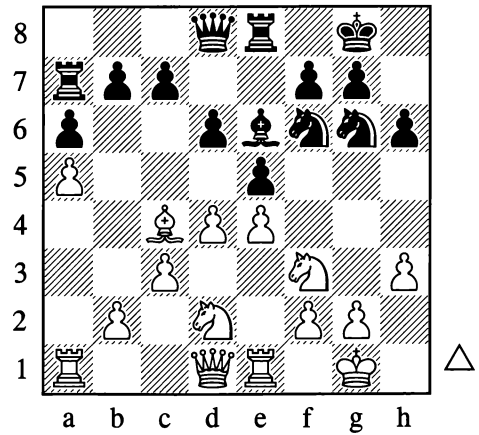


White to play

Jorden van Foreest – Hannes Stefansson

Prague 2020

2-8

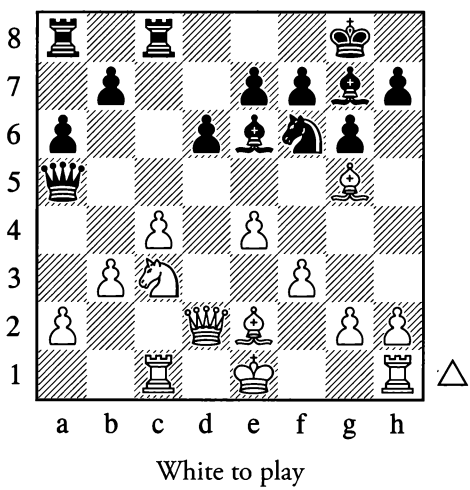


White to play

Anatoly Karpov – Lubomir Kavalek

Nice (Olympiad) 1974

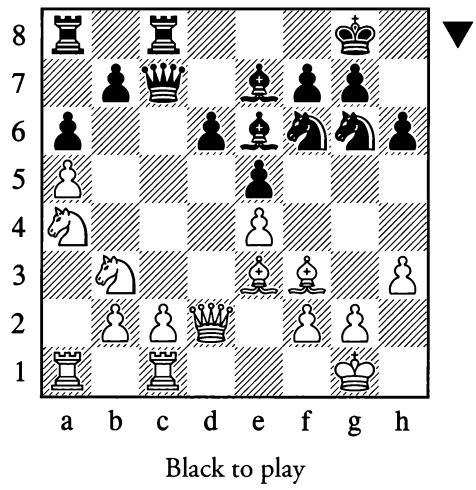
2-9



Alexander Areshchenko – Kirill Shevchenko

Kiev (blitz) 2021

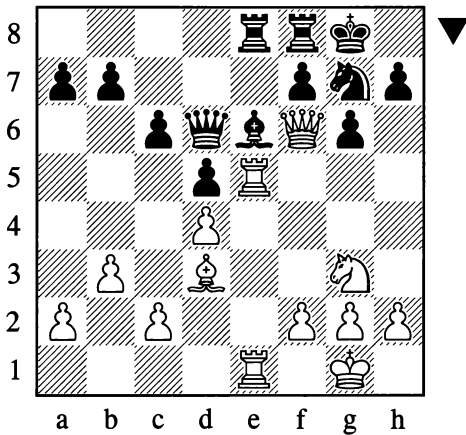
2-10



Solutions

2-1. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So

Saint Louis 2021



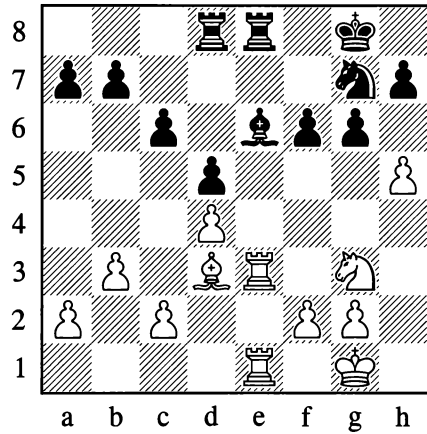
22...♕xd8!

Black is getting squeezed, so he tries to exchange queens in order to quench White's attack and find some breathing room.

23.♖xd8

Keeping the queens on the board with 23.♖f4 is logical but doesn't lead White anywhere. After 23...♕d7 offering the exchange of the rooks, Black is planning ...♖e6, ...♗fe8 and ...f7-f6, when White would be forced to accept massive exchanges. If that ever happens, for example immediately with 24.♖xe8 ♖xe8 25.♖xe8† ♕xe8, by simplifying the game, Black will secure equality.

23...♖xd8 24.h4 ♖fe8 25.h5 f6 26.♖5e3



26...♕f7

After a few preparatory moves, Black has stabilized the situation on the kingside and proceeds to offer more exchanges.

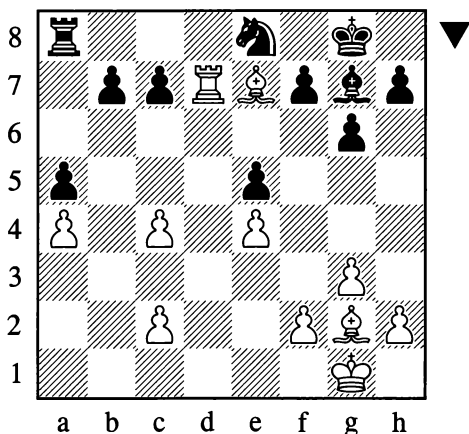
27.hxg6 hxg6 28.♖xe8† ♖xe8 29.♖xe8† ♕xe8

The position has petered out to complete equality.

...½-½

2-2. Georg Meier – Jorden van Foreest

Karlsruhe 2020



18...♙f8!

It feels like Black has less space due to White's highly active pieces and bishop pair, so it makes sense for him to seek some exchanges.

19.♙d8

The only try. White tries to keep his bishop pair.

19...♞a6!

Another precise move, aiming to activate the black rook or trade it for its very active counterpart.

20.♙xc7

This is kind of forced, as otherwise Black would play ...♞d6 or ...♞c6 and he would start getting ambitious.

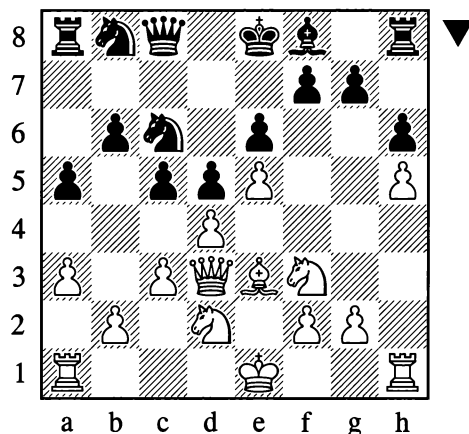
20...♜xc7 21.♞xc7 ♞c6 22.♞xc6 bxc6

The position is a dead draw because of the presence of opposite-coloured bishops.

...½–½

2-3. Jorden van Foreest – Anthony Wirig

Châlons en Champagne 2021



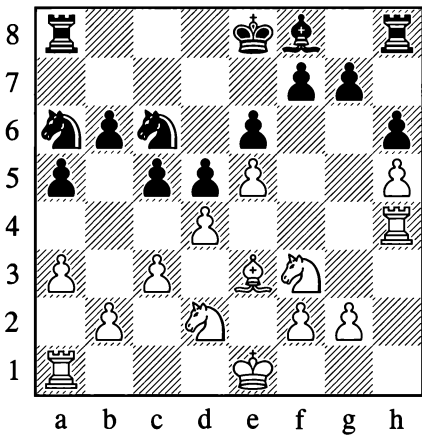
12...♞a6!

Black, who has already managed to exchange the light-squared bishops, offers the exchange of queens. As we have already seen in Mitkov – Dreev from the previous chapter, this is an excellent strategy in such positions. White's extra space provides him with some attacking chances but, on the other hand, the base of his pawn chain will be more exposed after an eventual capture on d4. In general, that would mean endgames tend to favour Black.

13.♞xa6

13.♞c2 a4 leads to a complex position with chances for both sides, as White's space advantage is balanced out by Black's extremely irritating queen on a6.

13...♜xa6 14.♞h4

**14...cxd4**

14...b5!? is an interesting alternative, trying to get some more space and counterplay on the queenside. After 15.♖g4 a4 16.♗e2 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♖a5 we reach dynamic equality.

15.cxd4 ♗e7

15...a4! would be better, grabbing more space on the queenside and placing one more pawn on the opposite colour of the bishops.

16.♗e2 ♖c8 17.g4 ♗c6

After 17...♖c2 18.♖b1 the black rook would soon have to backtrack.

18.♗e1 ♗e7

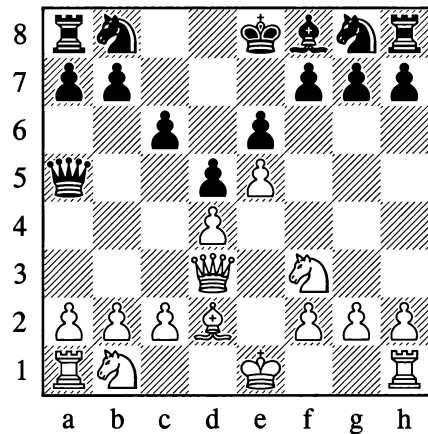
The position is balanced but White eventually won.

...1–0

2-4. Andre Oberhofer – Rustem Dautov

Germany 2017

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♗f5 4.♗d3 ♗xd3
5.♖xd3 e6 6.♗f3 ♖a5† 7.♗d2

**7...♖a6!**

We have seen two similar examples already. This is a typical move in such positions.

8.b4

In the event of 8.♖xa6 ♗xa6 9.c3 c5 Black obtains equality. He will continue by trying to transfer his knights to f5 and c6, to attack the base of White's pawn chain on d4.

White could also avoid the exchange of queens, but the queen is annoying on a6 (how is White going to castle?) and Black will soon arrange counterplay with ...c5.

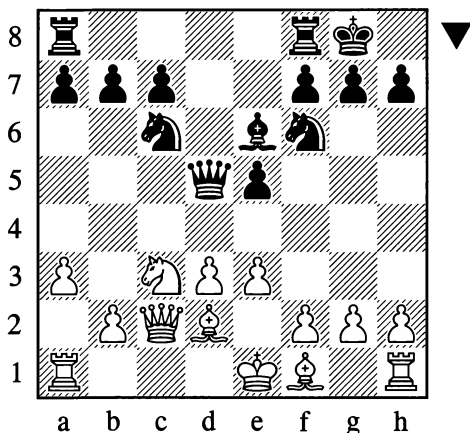
8...♖xd3 9.cxd3 ♗d7 10.0–0 f6 11.a3 ♗e7

Black has no problems.

...0–1

2-5. Anton Korobov – Jorden van Foreest

Linares 2020

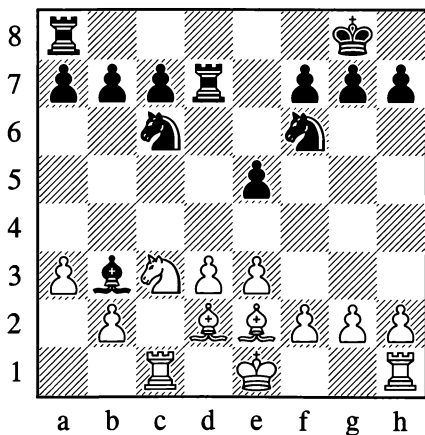


10...♔b3?

Black should have avoided the exchange, for two reasons. Firstly, he has an advantage in space and the exchange helps his opponent find some breathing room. Secondly, White has the bishop pair, so he benefits from reaching an endgame.

10...♔d7 would be correct, with equal chances. White's long-term assets are balanced out by Black's lead in development and central control.

11.♔xb3 ♕xb3 12.♖c1 ♖fd8 13.♕c2 ♗d7



14.g4!

A great positional move, carving the e4-square as an outpost for the c3-knight.

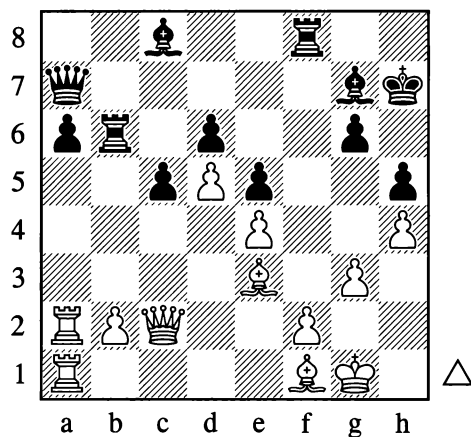
14...♗e7 15.g5 ♗fd5 16.♗e4

White had a significant advantage and went on to win.

...1-0

2-6. Arjun Erigaisi – David Shahinyan

Tsaghkadzor 2021



27.♔d2!

A strong prophylactic move. Having a space advantage due to his d5-pawn, White prevents his opponent from exchanging his bad dark-squared bishop.

For example, after 27.♖a3?! Black can get rid of his bad bishop with 27...♗h6! 28.♗xh6 ♖xh6 and White's advantage gets reduced.

27.♔c1!, with the same idea as in the game, is also strong.

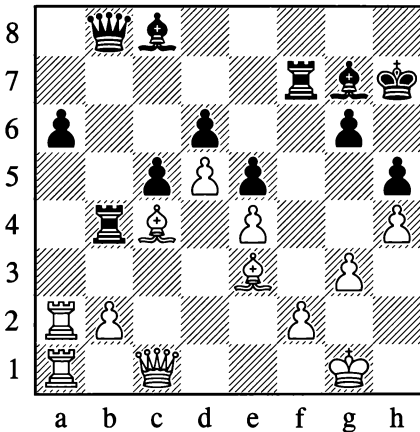
27...♔b8 28.♔c1 ♖b4 29.♕c4

Black's weak pawn on a6, the weakness of his kingside, and his bad bishop on g7 give White a huge advantage.

29...♖f7?

Losing by force the pawn on a6.

29...♔c7! with the idea of ...♔f7 would provide a more stubborn defence.



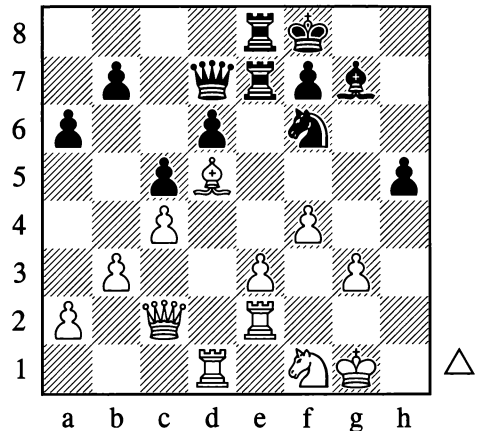
30.♙d2! ♜b6 31.♙a5 ♜bb7 32.♙xa6 ♜b3 33.♙xc8 ♜xc8 34.♙c3

White is a healthy pawn up while anyway having a strategically winning position. He converted his advantage to a full point without any trouble.

...1–0

2-7. Amir Bagheri – Aloyzas Kveinys

Paris 2004

**28.♙f3!**

White avoids the trade of his bishop for the opponent's knight as he has an obvious space advantage. Moreover, the bishop is a vital defender of the light squares around the king.

28...h4

An understandable try. In a difficult position, Black wants to get some counterplay by a pawn sacrifice. His main goal is to destroy the shelter of the white king.

If 28...♘g4, then White would have a big advantage after 29.♙d3 ♜e6 30.♙d1! ♜g6 31.♙ed2 and he continues to mount pressure against the d6-pawn. It is not easy to see where Black's attempt at a kingside attack is leading.

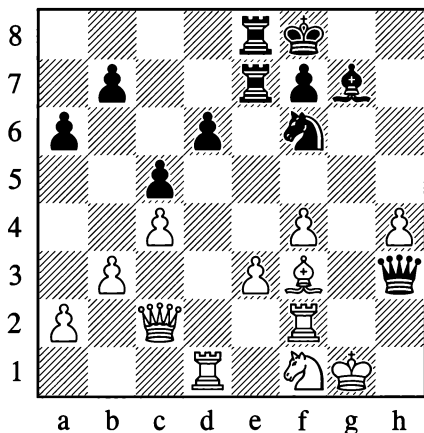
29.gxh4?

This mistake gives Black a chance to complicate matters.

White should have simply exerted more pressure on the pawn on d6: 29.♙ed2 hxg3 (in the event of 29...♜e6 30.gxh4 the path of Black's queen to the h3-square is blocked) 30.♙xd6 ♜h3 31.♙g2 White keeps everything

under control and retains a winning position, as the g3-pawn will fall soon.

29...♖h3 30.♖f2



30...♖xe3!

By sacrificing an exchange Black destroys the white structure and gets a tonne of counterplay on the dark squares.

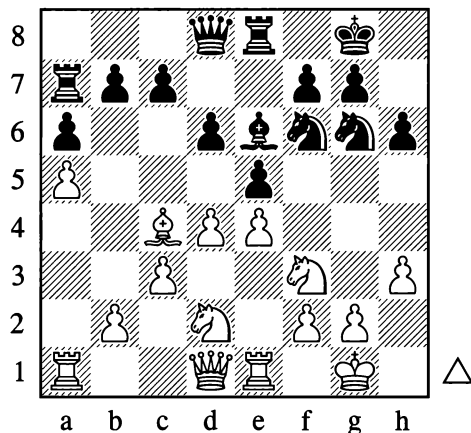
31.♗g2 ♖xh4 32.♘xe3 ♗xe3 33.♖d2

The position is unclear.

...1-0

2-8. Jorden van Foreest – Hannes Stefansson

Prague 2020



15.♗f1!?

Playing according to the principles. Having more space, White avoids the unnecessary exchange of bishops.

However, immediately grabbing more space with 15.d5! would be even stronger: 15...♗d7 16.♖b3 ♘f4 17.♗f1 ♖e7 18.c4 White would first drive the opponent's knight away from f4 by playing ♗h2 and g2-g3, and then prepare a breakthrough with an eventual c4-c5.

15...♖c8

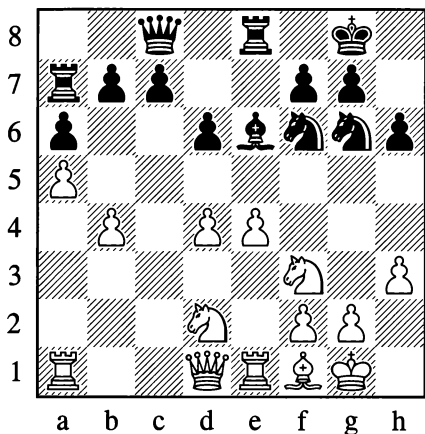
Controlling the d5-square with 15...c6 was a better option.

16.b4 exd4!?

Releasing the tension in the centre is in White's favour. He gains even more space and control over the semi-open c-file. At the same time, Black's pieces are not ready for a direct confrontation. Look for example at that silly rook on a7.

Taking it slow with 16...c6 would once again be better.

17.cxd4



17...d5!?

Helping White favourably clarify the situation in the centre.

18.e5 ♖d7

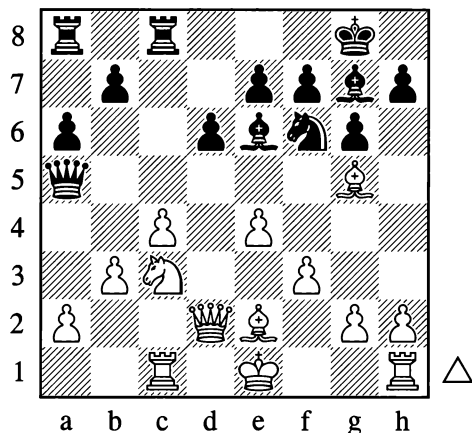
This is a great structure for White.

19.♖c2 ♜a8 20.♞ac1 c6 21.♜b3

White has a strategically winning position. Black's queenside pawn majority is blocked, so White is practically a pawn up on the kingside without having to face any serious counterplay.
...1-0

2-9. Anatoly Karpov – Lubomir Kavalek

Nice (Olympiad) 1974



14.♜a4!

Karpov shows excellent understanding. Despite having a large advantage in space, he offers the exchange of queens. This is because White's most important task is to prevent the opponent's freeing breaks. With ♜a4, Karpov prevents Black from playing ...b7-b5.

The main point is that after 14.0-0? Black has 14...b5! with counterplay.

In fact, Karpov's move remains to this day standard theory, both in this position and with the bishop on e3 instead of g5. Hundreds of games have been played in both versions with White always having a slight advantage in the endgame.

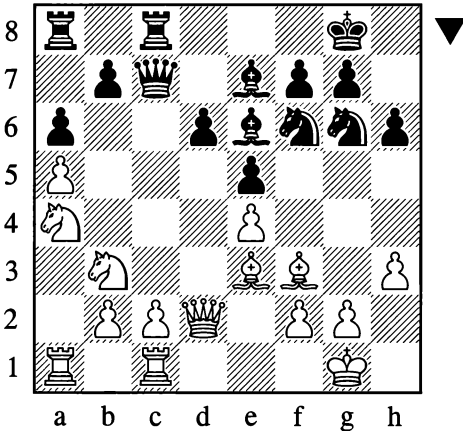
14...♞xd2† 15.♜xd2! ♜c6 16.♜c3 ♞ac8 17.♜d5

White has a serious edge due to his space advantage. Let's not forget that as the endgame approaches, the presence of the white king in the centre is also a great plus.

...1-0

2-10. Alexander Areshchenko – Kirill Shevchenko

Kyiv (blitz) 2021



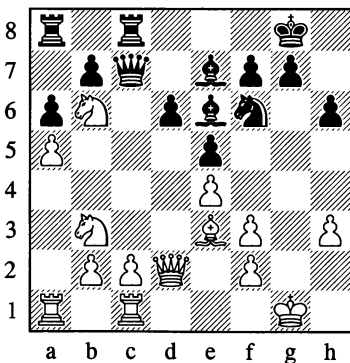
An example of using an exchange to prepare a liberating move.

18...Nf4!

Ignoring White's threat of Bb6. By trading his knight for the opponent's bishop on f3, Black prepares the freeing ...d6-d5 break.

19. Bxd1

There was also the greedy option:
19. Bb6 Bxf3† 20. gxf3



20...Bab8

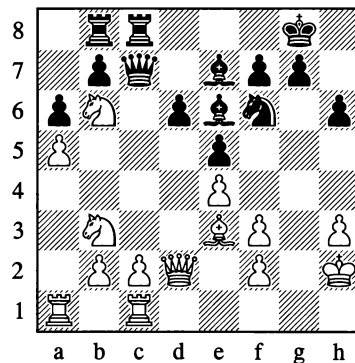
But not 20...Bxh3?! because of 21. Bxh6!. If Black takes the piece with 21...gxh6?!, then

after 22. Bxh6 Bxe6 23. Bg2! White's sudden attack on the h-file is irresistible.

21. Bh2

The lesser evil.

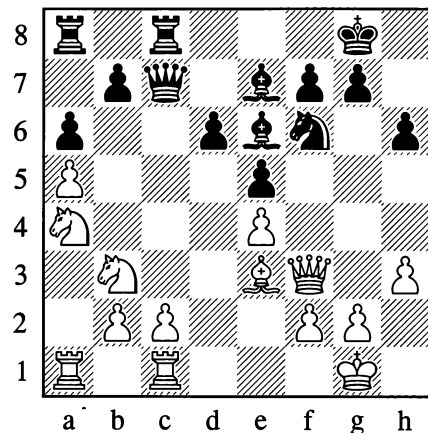
Taking the exchange on offer with 21. Bxc8? only helps Black. The game would continue 21...Bxc8 22. Bh2 d5! and Black has more than enough compensation for the exchange. White is still able to complicate matters by playing 23. Bxh6, but there isn't any real attack against the black king. Black would simply take the pawn with 23...dxe4 and retain a huge initiative.



21...Bh7!

Preparing ...Bg5. Black will have more than enough compensation for the sacrificed exchange.

19...Bxf3† 20. Bxf3



20...d5!

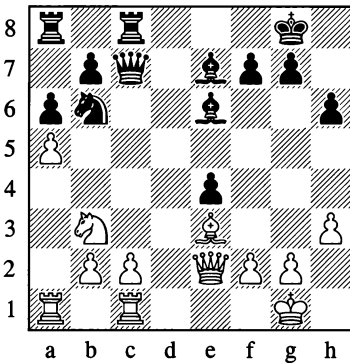
Black has the advantage of the bishop pair, and this typical liberating thrust comes with great effect.

21.♟b6?

White finally cannot resist the temptation of winning the exchange.

He should have played:

21.exd5 e4 22.♞e2 ♜xd5 23.♟b6 ♜xb6

**24.axb6!**

Clearing the a5-square so that it can be used by the b3-knight or the a1-rook.

24...♞e5 25.♞a5

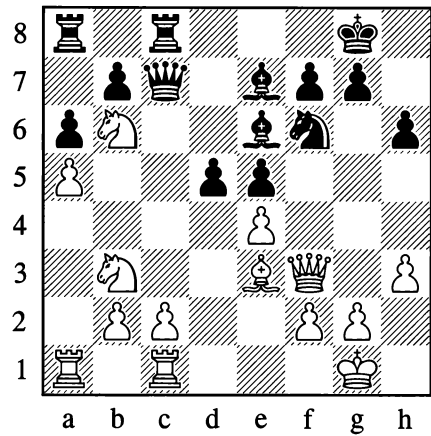
If the black queen had chosen any other square, the move would have been 25.♟a5. However, the queen specifically went to e5 so that Black could reply to this with 25...♞d6!, when it is awkward for White to defend against ...♞h2†.

25...♞d6

Grabbing the pawn is also possible: 25...♞xb2 26.♞d4 ♞xb3 27.cxb3 ♞xc1† 28.♟h2 With an unclear game.

26.♞c5! ♞xc5 27.♞xc5 ♞c6 28.♞xe7 ♞xb3

With equality.

**21...d4?!**

A better option was: 21...dxe4! 22.♞e2 ♜d7 23.♟xa8 ♞xa8 Black has more than enough compensation for the exchange, due to his well-coordinated pieces and the mobile kingside majority.

22.♞d2 ♞c6

The game is objectively unclear, but Black retains a practical superiority as he has an easier position to handle. Not bad for a blitz game, don't you think?

The game was eventually won by White after further adventures.

...1-0

Chapter 3

Exchanges and Attack

In this chapter, we are going to discuss the relationship between exchanges and king safety. We will investigate how exchanges can facilitate an attack against the king and, on the other hand, how they can play a crucial part in a successful defensive effort.

It is not uncommon for chess players to find themselves so engrossed with positional factors, that they neglect the most important and fascinating part of chess: the attack against the king. After all, it is checkmate that ends the game.

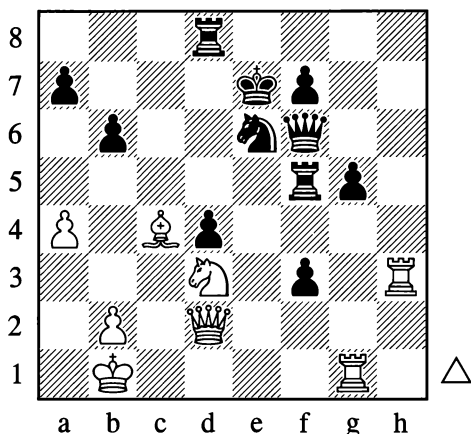
Regarding exchanges, classical wisdom dictates that a player with attacking chances should try to avoid them. The fewer pieces on the board, the more the power of an attack tends to diminish. On the other hand, using exchanges to remove the defenders of the opponent's king is one of the most effective tools to succeed in an attack. This apparent paradox will be at the centre of our discussion. How do we know when our attack is going to be strengthened by an exchange and when an exchange will make the attack evaporate? Our goal with this chapter is to shed light on the intricacies of this matter.

Removing a Vital Defender

Sometimes, having a defending piece close by is so vital to the king's safety that it reminds us of the relationship between an Eskimo and his clothes. If he takes them off, he will not survive the unbearable cold of the pole!

Fabiano Caruana – Alireza Firouzja

Wijk aan Zee 2020



White has an extra piece but, in return for it, Black has four passed pawns. What a mess! However, with the black king stuck in the centre, if His Majesty was to be attacked, every other positional factor would be overshadowed by his upcoming demise.

35. ♔xe6!

Caruana chooses a straightforward attacking approach. In most cases, when we have an extra piece in exchange for pawns, we should avoid exchanging pieces as the pawns get stronger the closer we get to an endgame. Nevertheless, because of the awful position of the black king, in this case White correctly decides to remove an important defender. The statement about the value of pawns increasing in the endgame is irrelevant, because an endgame will not be reached. The black king is getting checkmated well before the pawns create any serious counterplay.

35. ♖h2 was also winning but, after the text move, the situation is easier for a human to handle.

35... ♗xe6?

This obvious move makes White's task easier.

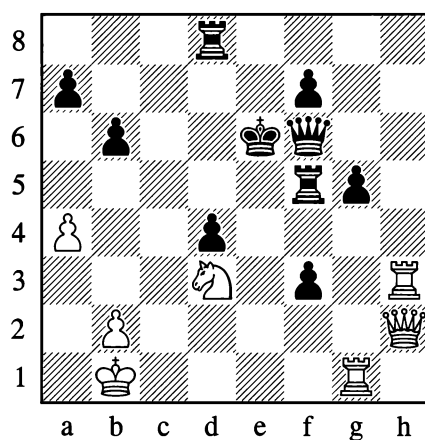
35... ♖xe6?? hangs the queen to 36. ♖e1.

After 35... fxe6?? 36. ♖h7† the black king is way too weak.

The way to complicate matters was: 35... f2! 36. ♖f1 ♗xe6 37. ♔xf2 ♖dd5 Black's position is still very difficult, but the game continues.

36. ♖h2!

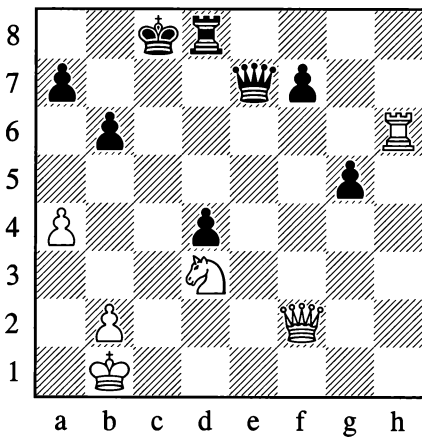
White threatens to win the black queen with ♖h6.

**36...f2**

The pawn will perish on f2 but there weren't any better alternatives.

If 36... ♖g8, then 37. ♖c1! and White wins by force: 37... f2 (37... ♖d8 38. ♖e1† leaves Black helpless against the opponent's threats.) 38. ♖c6† ♔e7 39. ♖c7† ♔f8 40. ♔xf2 ♖e5 41. ♖d7! ♖xf2 42. ♖c8† ♔g7 43. ♖xg8† ♔xg8 44. ♖c8† ♔g7 45. ♖h8† The black queen finally falls.

37. ♖f1 ♔d7 38. ♖h6 ♖e7 39. ♖xf2 ♖xf2 40. ♖xf2 ♔c8



It looks like Black's king has managed to take refuge on the queenside.

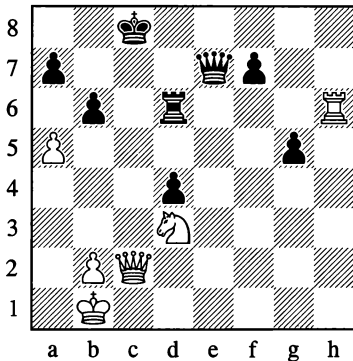
41.a5!

Caruana plays very energetically and does not let the opponent's king find shelter anywhere on the board.

41...bxa5

Trying to exchange rooks wouldn't help:

41...♞d6 42.♞c2†



The queen enters the attack with a check and Black's king has an impossible choice.

42...♞b8

42...♞b7 walks right into 43.a6†! which forces the black king to take a small but fun trip: 43...♞xa6 (43...♞b8 loses just like in the main line.) 44.♞c8† ♞a5 45.♞f5† ♞a6

46.♞b4† ♞b7 47.♞f3† ♞c7 48.♞a6† ♞d7 49.♞b7† ♞e8 50.♞h8† White wins.

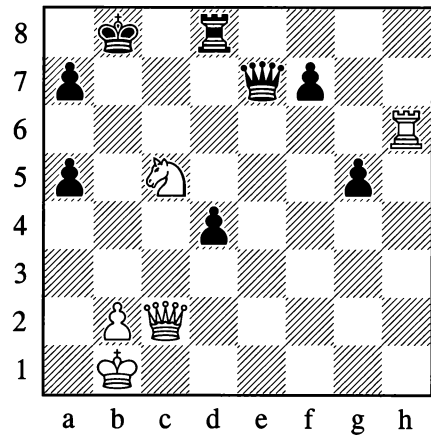
43.♞h8† ♞d8 44.♞e5!

Threatening ♞c6†.

44...d3 45.♞xd3!

Game over.

42.♞c2† ♞b8 43.♞c5



White's pieces have stormed through the barricades and the black monarch is a dead man walking.

43...♞d6

After 43...f6 44.♞h7 Black is unable to parry the threats.

44.♞h8† ♞d8 45.♞b3† ♞c7 46.♞b7† ♞d6 47.♞h6† f6 48.♞e4†

Black resigned.

1-0

Materially speaking, Black even was a tiny bit ahead at the starting position with four pawns for a piece, but the way Caruana handled that situation made the pawns feel entirely irrelevant. However, our main takeaway from this game should be something else.

The first impression upon looking at the starting position wasn't that the king on e7 was in such terrible danger. The e6-knight was taking pretty good care of His Majesty and it didn't look easy to create any serious threats. After that vital defender was eliminated, the white pieces mounted a swift attack that immediately led to the demise of the enemy king.

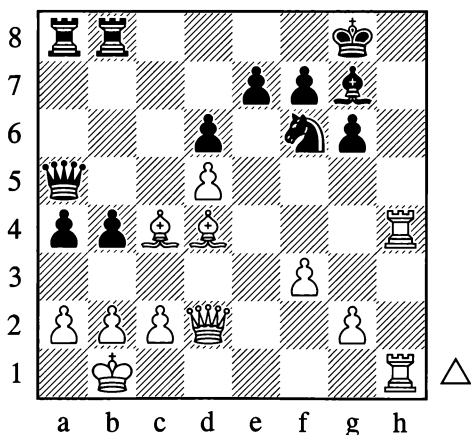
That's how quickly a situation can turn when taking the clothes off an Eskimo. The cold immediately got him.

The Fianchettoed Bishop

It is very common to try to exchange a fianchettoed bishop to get an attack against a castled king. In such cases, if the exchange is accepted, then a lot of important squares are weakened. It is worth noting, for example, that in the Dragon variation of the Sicilian, if Black can keep his g7-bishop he can hardly ever get mated down the h-file. If that bishop is exchanged, his king is always in terrible danger.

Vladimir Simagin – Moisei Abramson

Moscow 1960

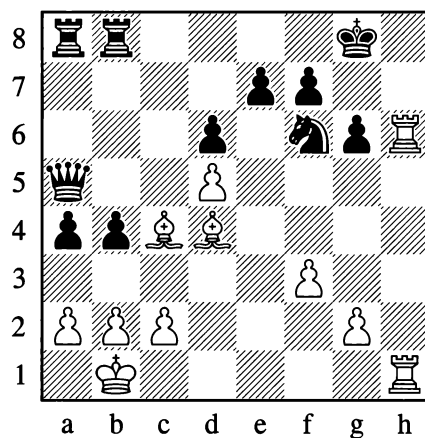


It looks like Black is in huge trouble down the h-file and White can win in a few different ways. Despite that, when trying to calculate how to bring home the full point, it could at first be annoyingly difficult. How is that g7-bishop single-handedly stopping all our threats?

22. ♖h6!!

White finds both the most stylish and the most instructive win. The queen surrenders herself to eliminate the g7-bishop. The threat is ♖h8†.

22... ♕xh6 23. ♖xh6

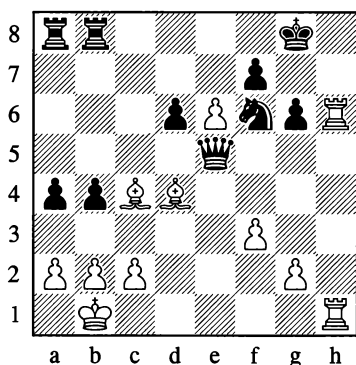


Without the bishop, the black king is doomed. There is no effective way to respond to White's threats. The main one is ♖h8† followed by ♖1h7#.

23...g5

This only prolongs the checkmating sequence.

23...e5 24.dxe6 ♖e5 is the only way not to get mated. (24...♖f8 25.♕xf6 fxe6 26.♕xe6 and ♖h8 will be mate on the next move.)



25.exf7+ ♖g7 26.♙e5 dxe5 27.♙d3 White is completely winning in the ensuing endgame.

23...♜f8 doesn't help: 24.♜h8+ ♖g8 25.♜xg8+ ♜xg8 26.♜h8#

24.♜h8+ ♜g7 25.♜1h7+ ♜g6 26.♙d3+ ♖e4 27.♙xe4+ f5 28.♜g7#

A prime example of why having the fianchettoed bishop is so important to the safety of the castled king.

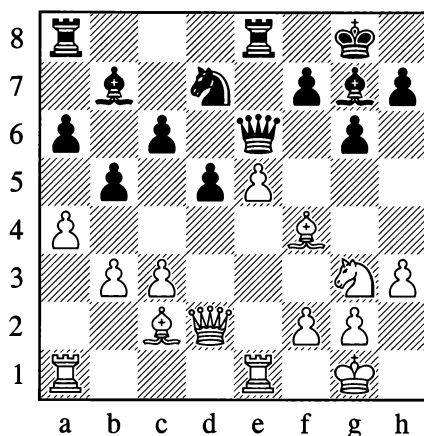
1–0

In the previous example, we saw what can happen to the defender if his fianchettoed bishop gets exchanged. In most cases, this operation is executed against the black g7-bishop with White playing ♙h6. If the exchange on h6 is refused, the opponent's bishop could block the king's escape and make the situation even worse. This is exactly what happens in the game below.

Magnus Carlsen – Alexei Shirov

Drammen 2005

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♖c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♖f6 5.0–0 ♙e7 6.♜e1 b5 7.♙b3 0–0 8.c3 d6 9.h3 ♖b8 10.d4 ♖bd7 11.♖bd2 ♙b7 12.♙c2 ♜e8 13.♖f1 ♙f8 14.♖g3 g6 15.b3 c6 16.♙g5 ♙g7 17.♜d2 ♜c7 18.a4 d5 19.dxe5 ♖xe5 20.♖xe5 ♜xe5 21.♙f4 ♜e6 22.e5 ♖d7



White has a strong pawn on e5 that grants him a space advantage and deprives the black knight of the f6-square. On top of that, the black bishop on b7 is passive and Black will need to use some time to get it into play. These factors are enough to give Carlsen the hint that a direct attack against the enemy king is in order.

23.♙h6!

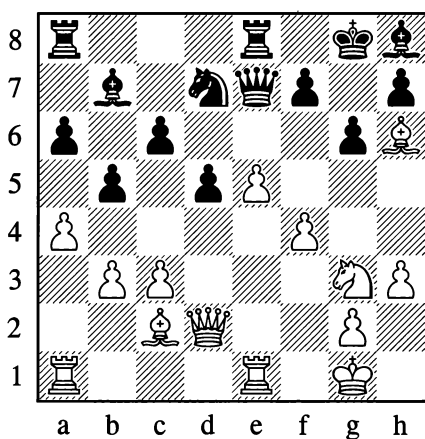
The most logical. The bishop on g7 is the main defender of the black king so White tries to exchange it. Furthermore, this move clears the path of the f2-pawn which will play an important role in the attack.

23...♙h8

Shirov feels the heat and refuses to exchange the bishop. However, the black king is imprisoned to the g8-square while the h6-bishop remains a useful attacking piece.

Even though Black's task remains unenviable, accepting the proposed exchange with 23...♙xh6 24.♜xh6 ♜e7 would be a better try.

24.f4 ♜e7

**25.♖e3**

Carlsen prepares all his pieces for the final assault on the kingside.

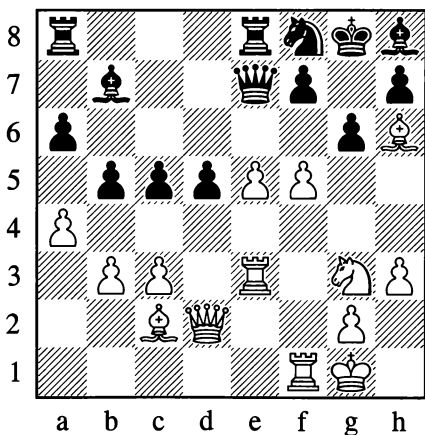
25...♘f8 26.♖f1

White's last remaining piece joins in on the operation.

26...c5 27.f5?

Tempting but hasty. The situation wasn't ripe for this breakthrough just yet.

White should have played 27.♖f2 first and only after 27...♖ac8 push through with 28.f5, gaining a dangerous initiative on the kingside.

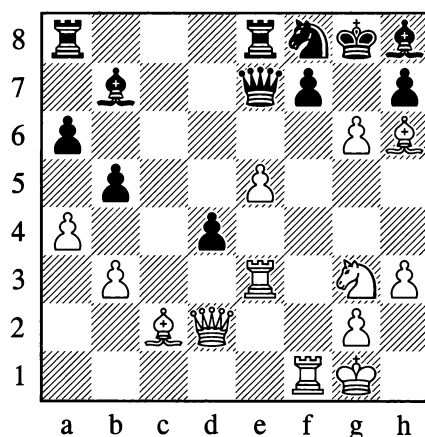
**27...d4!**

Shirov immediately takes advantage of the opportunity and tries to gain counterplay with a timely blow in the centre.

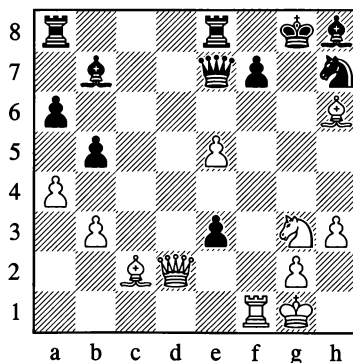
28.cxd4 cxd4 29.fxg6?!

Understandably, Carlsen again refuses to take his foot off the gas pedal.

However, objectively speaking, 29.♖e1 was stronger and more circumspect.

**29...hxg6**

Shirov had an exciting alternative, but it was very difficult to calculate during the game: 29...dxe3!? 30.gxh7+ ♖xh7

**31.♖e2**

But not 31.♖d3?? due to 31...♘f8 and Black wins.

31...♙xe5 32.♙xh7† ♚xh7 33.♖h5

White is already down a rook while Black has active pieces and a dangerous passed pawn on e3. However, there are very serious threats against the black king.

33...e2!? 34.♖xf7† ♖xf7 35.♖xf7† ♚xh6
36.♜xe2 ♙e4 37.♜f4 bxa4 38.bxa4 ♖ab8

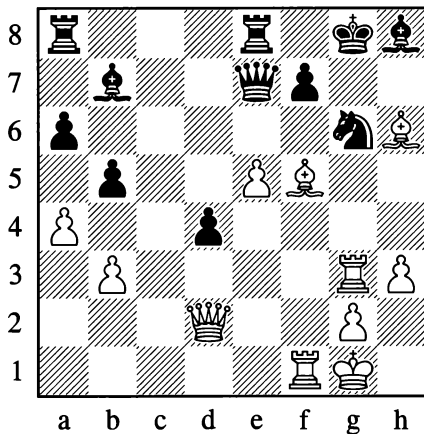
With an extremely complicated battle.

30.♜f5?!

Carlsen plays in Shirov's style!

30.♖ee1 would again be better, with an unclear game. Nevertheless, it was clear already from the previous move that "losing a tempo" with the rook was what Carlsen was trying to avoid.

30...gxf5 31.♖g3† ♜g6 32.♙xf5



32...♖xe5?!

Good enough but not the best reaction.

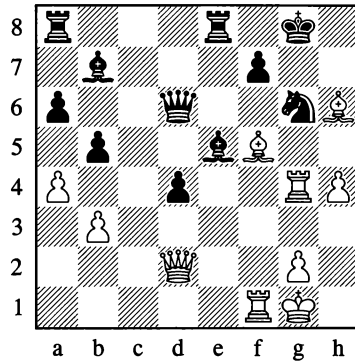
32...♙xe5! would have given Black the upper hand after a series of accurate defensive moves. White has two options:

a) 33.♖g4?!

The most natural but it gets swiftly refuted.

33...♖d6 34.h4

34.♖d3 ♙c8! and Black defends.



34...♙c8!

A key defensive resource.

35.h5 ♙xf5 36.♖xf5 d3 37.hxg6 f6

White's pawn on g6 stops his attack while Black is going to promote the d-pawn.

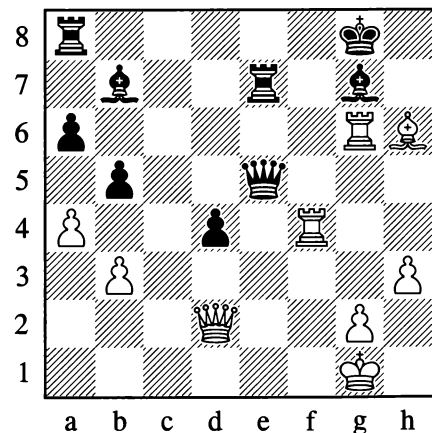
So, the rook should stay away from the h3-c8 diagonal to prevent a future ...♙c8 exchanging the f5-bishop:

b) 33.♖g5! ♖d6 34.♖d3 ♚h8 35.♖h5 ♖c6
36.♙d2† ♚g7 37.♖g5 ♖ad8

White's compensation is hanging by a thread but objectively he should be fine.

33.♖g4 ♙g7 34.♙xg6 fxg6 35.♖xg6 ♖e7
36.♖f4

Carlsen tries to double on the g-file.



36...♙e4??

Shirov, who had managed to repel the opponent's attack well up to this point, makes a decisive mistake.

Correct would be:

36...♜f8

Trying to exchange more pieces yet again.

37.♞xd4

After 37.♜fg4 ♜ff7 Black would defend calmly in Karpov style along the seventh rank and could count on his extra piece to give him the better chances.

37...♞xd4† 38.♜xd4 ♜f6 39.♜xg7† ♜xg7 40.♙xg7 ♙xg7 41.♞d7† ♜f7 42.♞d6 ♜c7

Even though this should objectively be a draw, only Black has winning chances.

37.♜g5!

A strong intermediate move that Shirov had neglected. The queen has to lose connection with either the e4-bishop or the d4-pawn. The game is over.

37...♞e6 38.♙xg7

Black resigned.

It was hopeless to play on: 38...♜xg7 39.♜xg7† ♙xg7 40.♞xd4† White wins.

1–0

Black did deny the exchange of his fianchettoed bishop to preserve some control over the dark squares but, as we saw, this choice also had some serious downsides. The h8-bishop severely restricted the mobility of the black king.

It is important to note that – even though, when checking with a computer, this game appears to be full of mistakes and inaccuracies – Carlsen's ruthless attacking mindset posed problems of such difficulty that a player of

Shirov's calibre quickly collapsed. "Objective" evaluations by the engine are not the only criteria with which a move should be judged. Its practical virtues should also be considered.

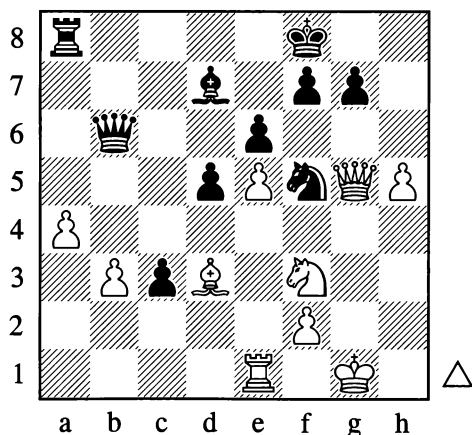
In the previous two examples, we focused on the black kingside fianchetto and the g7-bishop only because it is the most frequent example of exchanging a fianchettoed bishop. Of course, the same doctrine applies to both colours and both sides of castling. You shouldn't be surprised if with White's king castled long and a bishop on b2, Black should angle for ...♙a3, exchanging the b2-bishop.

Facilitating a Breakthrough

It is very common to exchange an opponent's vital defensive piece to facilitate a breakthrough. In this case, a piece is exchanged not because it is the sole defender of the enemy king, but to open the floodgates for other attackers to crash through.

Magnus Carlsen – Jeffery Xiong

Isle of Man 2017



White's pieces are well placed, and they are looking for a way to reach the black king.

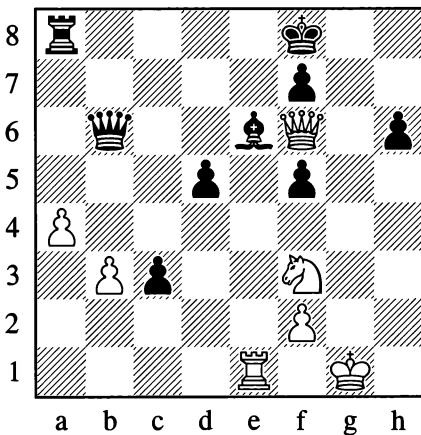
28. ♖xf5! exf5 29. e6!

An instructive breakthrough. Carlsen prepared this by chopping off the black knight, a key protector of the kingside dark squares, and then immediately grabbed the chance to increase the activity of his rook and knight. At the same time, this thrust severs the connection between the black queen and the kingside.

29... ♗xe6 30. h6! gxh6 31. ♖f6!

Carlsen gives the opponent's king no chance to escape the danger.

31. ♖xh6† would not be accurate, because after 31... ♖e7 32. ♖g5† ♖d6 the black king could escape.

**31... ♖g8?**

Under pressure, Black makes a grave mistake.

He should have played 31... ♖d8, although after 32. ♖xc3 White would keep the initiative thanks to his two connected passed pawns on the queenside and the opponent's exposed king.

32. ♖xh6 ♖b4 33. ♖h1

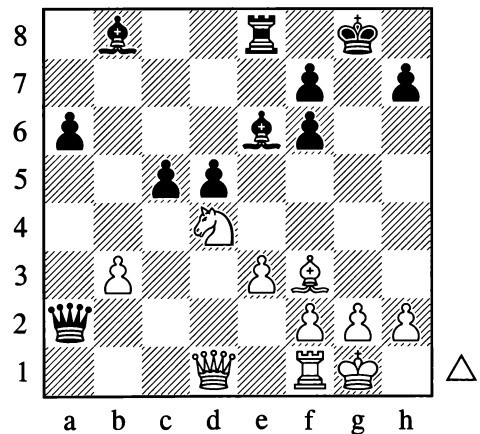
The threat of ♖g1 is lethal and Black resigned.
1-0

The main reason Carlsen took the knight on f5 was to facilitate the devastating e5-e6 break after which the shelter of the black king was destroyed, and all the white pieces gained in activity. However, it was also relevant that the f5-knight was an important defender of the kingside dark squares.

Facilitating a breakthrough can often be related to removing the defender of a certain colour complex. This is exactly what happens in the next game.

Hikaru Nakamura – Bilel Bellahcene

Khanty-Mansiysk 2019



Nakamura is faced with a dilemma: should he trade his knight for the opponent's bishop on e6 at the cost of repairing Black's pawn structure, or avoid the exchange to keep his structural trumps?

22. ♖xe6!

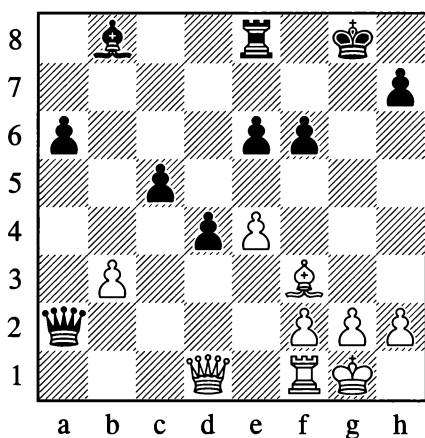
White gets rid of the opponent's bishop pair and goes for the initiative in the opposite-coloured bishops' position. We should always remember how in such cases the side with the initiative feels like having an extra piece.

White achieves nothing after: 22.♘c6 d4 23.♙e4 (23.exd4 ♙xb3 leaves Black with an extra pawn and it's not clear how White can exploit Black's kingside weaknesses.) 23...f5 24.♙h5 fxe4 25.♙g5† ♕f8 26.♙h6† ♖g8 27.♙g5† With a draw.

22...fxe4 23.e4!

This lever is the right follow-up to Black's previous move. By provoking Black to play ...d5-d4 Nakamura tries to weaken the a2-g8 diagonal and increase the activity of his own bishop.

23...d4



24.♙h5

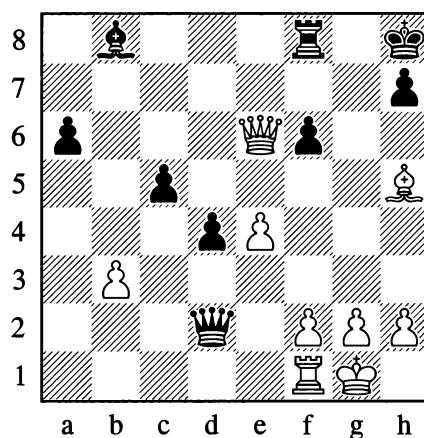
24.♙e2 with the idea of ♙c4 is also strong.

24...♞f8

Black sacrifices the e6-pawn, hoping to get some chances to defend after transferring his queen to the kingside via d2.

If 24...♞e7, then 25.♙e2! ♕h8 26.♙c4 and White would have a decisive initiative.

25.♙g4† ♕h8 26.♙xe6 ♙d2



27.g3

A typical move in such situations, restricting the activity of the opponent's bishop and preparing a future f2-f4.

27.♙e7 ♙h6 28.♙xc5 d3 29.♞d1 ♞d8 30.g3 would also be winning, but Nakamura correctly tries to be as technical as possible in his approach.

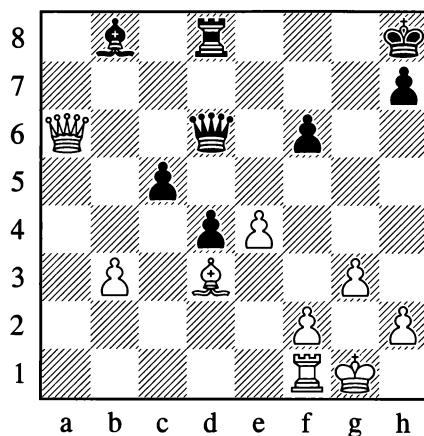
27...♙h6!?

More stubborn resistance would be offered by: 27...♙g5 28.♙e2 ♙e5 29.♙xa6 ♙xe4 30.♙d3 ♙e7 Nevertheless, due to Black's weak king White would retain a winning position.

28.♙e2 ♞d8 29.♙xa6

White is a pawn up and has a better structure.

29...♙f8 30.♙d3 ♙d6



31.♖a1!?

Nakamura realizes that this position is winning for White even without the presence of queens.

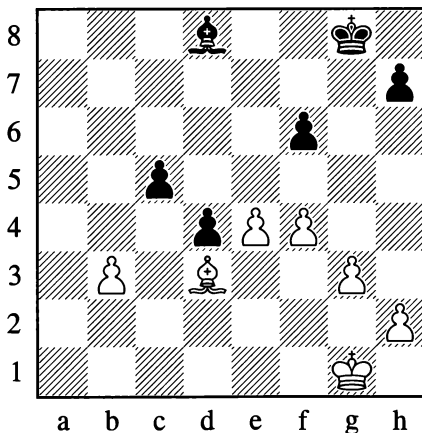
After 31.♖c4 ♖e7 32.♖a1 White would also be winning.

It seems logical that with the presence of opposite-coloured bishops and considering the opponent's weak king, it is better for White not to exchange queens. Despite that, the technical way Nakamura chooses is also perfectly adequate.

31...♔g7 32.♖xd6 ♕xd6 33.♖a7† ♔g8 34.f4

The rest is only a matter of technique.

34...♕b8 35.♖a8 ♕c7 36.♖xd8† ♕xd8



With such a huge disparity between the activity of the bishops and the quality of the structure, even the pure opposite-coloured bishop endgame is easily winning.

37.♔g2 ♕c7 38.♔h3 ♔g7 39.♔g4 ♕d8 40.♔f5 ♔f7 41.e5 fxe5 42.♔xe5 h6 43.♔f5 ♔g7 44.g4 ♕h4 45.g5 ♕e1 46.♔g4 hxe5 47.fxe5

Considering how Black's pawns are completely blocked, White could claim he is not one pawn up, but two. Black resigned.

1–0

This game could also belong to a further section in this chapter called “Attacking on a Colour Complex”. After removing the defender of the light squares Nakamura quickly got a decisive initiative. The e6-bishop had to be eliminated to facilitate the e3-e4 breakthrough and the light-squared domination that followed. As we saw, the attack against the black king overshadowed everything else.

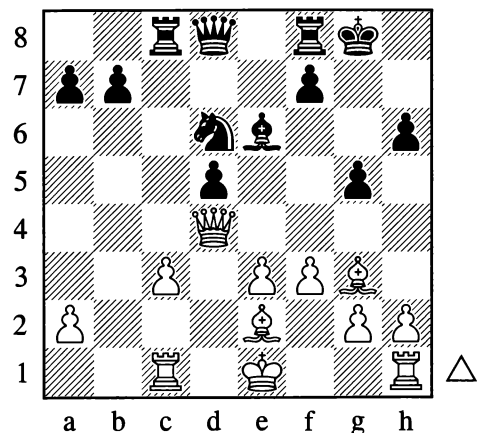
Refraining from “fixing” the black structure by not capturing on e6 would mean seriously overestimating structural factors, to say the least. Long-term considerations can be thrown out the window when a king is about to be checkmated.

No Time to Lose

Sometimes, in double-edged situations, an exchange might be carried out only because it wins an important tempo.

Richard Rapport – Aryan Tari

Stavanger 2021



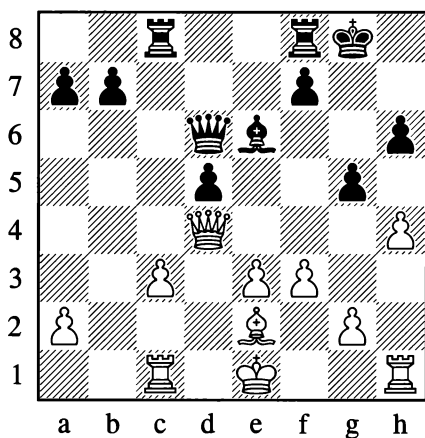
Black has already weakened his king's position by playing ...g7-g5. Given that White also has some weaknesses on the queenside, speeding up a kingside attack and gaining the initiative is of the utmost importance.

19.♙xd6!

Rapport does not waste any time defending against the threat of ...♘f5 and decides to accelerate the attack on the kingside at the cost of surrendering his bishop pair.

19...♖xd6 20.h4!

When the opponent's knight pawn has already moved, attacking it with our rook pawn is a useful method to weaken the opponent's structure or open a file in our favour.



20...♖b6?

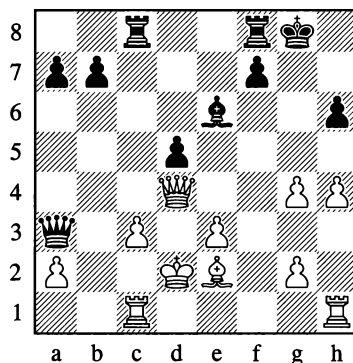
Frightened by the incoming attack, Black immediately offers the exchange of queens. However, this comes at the cost of an important tempo, and he is entering an unpleasant, passive ending.

He should have tried to complicate matters by seeking active counterplay on the queenside:

20...♖a3! 21.♙d2

21.♙f2 can be answered by 21...g4! 22.♙hd1 ♖e7! with annoying counterplay.

21...g4! 22.fxg4



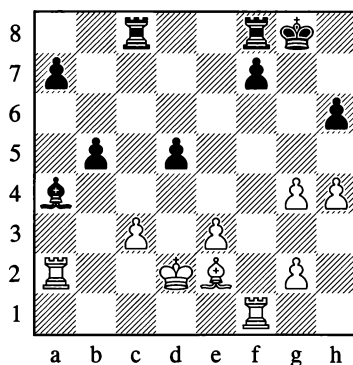
22...♙d7!

With the idea of ...♙a4, trying to control the vital c2-square.

23.♖b4! ♖xa2†

After 23...♖xb4 24.cxb4 White's extra pawn, his active king and the opponent's weak pawn on d5 would guarantee an advantage.

24.♙c2 ♖a4 25.♖xa4 ♙xa4 26.♙a2 b5 27.♙f1
With the threats of ♙f6 and ♙f5.



27...♙b3! 28.♙xa7 b4!

Black continues going above and beyond to get some activity for his pieces.

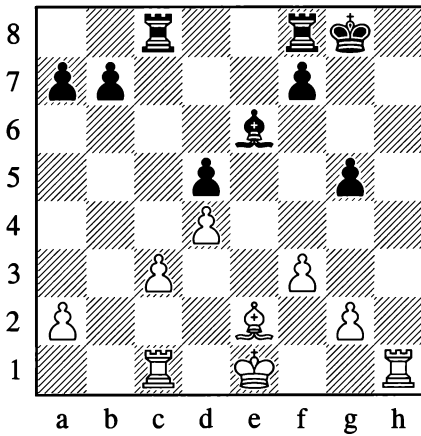
29.♙c1

29.cxb4 allows 29...♙c2† 30.♙d3 ♙b2 31.♙c3 ♙xe2 32.♙xb3 ♙xe3† with good drawing chances.

29...bxc3† 30.♙xc3 ♙c4!

White would have only a slight advantage.

21.hxg5! ♖xd4 22.exd4 hxg5



23.♞h5!

White gains an important tempo by attacking the g5-pawn and provokes his opponent to create more weakness on the kingside. Note that each time a black pawn moves the seventh rank becomes weaker. Rapport will eventually take advantage of this weakening.

23...f6 24.♞d3!

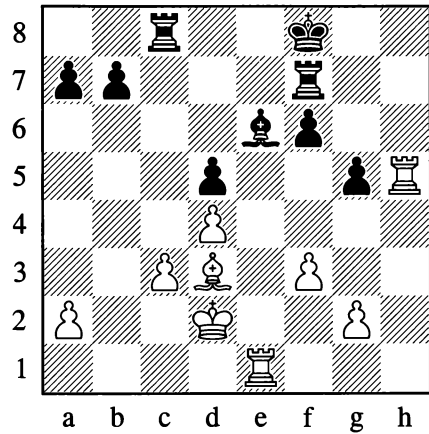
Compare White's active bishop with its counterpart.

In the event of 24.♞d2?, then 24...♙g7 with the idea of ...♞h8 would reduce White's advantage.

24...♞f7 25.♞d2!

By defending the c3-pawn White releases the c1-rook.

25...♞f8 26.♞e1



26...♞c6

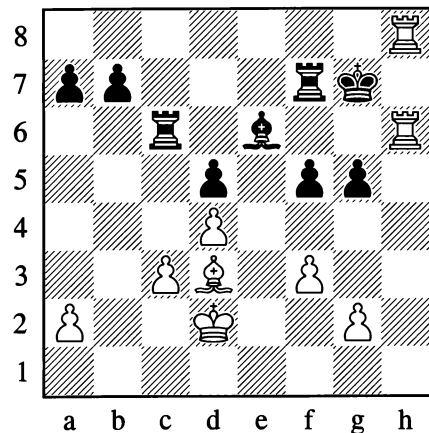
26...♞d7 can be answered with 27.♞h6!, preventing the idea of ...♞g7 followed by ...♞f7. After 27...♞c6 28.♞h8† ♙g7 29.♞eh1 we get a position similar to the game continuation.

27.♞h8† ♙g7 28.♞eh1

Since all of White's pieces are more active than their counterparts and his king is safer, his advantage is undeniable.

28...f5 29.♞1h7† ♙f6 30.♞h6† ♙g7

After 30...♞e7 31.♞b5 Black is forced to give up the exchange because if the c6-rook moves, then ♞e8† picks up the bishop. If 31...♞c8, then 32.♞xe6†! ♙xe6 33.♞xc8 and White wins a piece.



31.♙b5

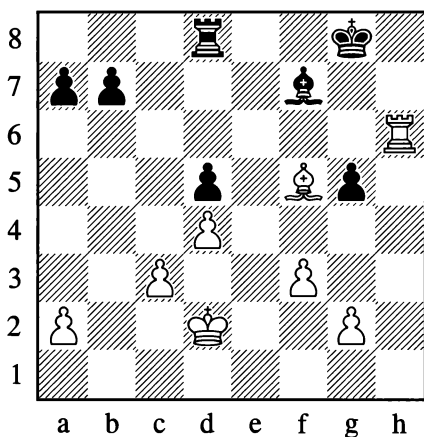
The easier way to win would be 31.♞h7+ ♕f8 32.♞xf7! ♕xf7 33.♞h7+ ♕f6 34.♞xb7 retaining the advantage in activity and a clean extra pawn.

31...♞c8

31...♞b6?? is a blunder: 32.♙e8 ♞b2+ 33.♕d3 ♞e7 (33...♞c7 34.♞h7+ drops the c7-rook) 34.♞h7+ ♕f6 35.♞f8+ White wins.

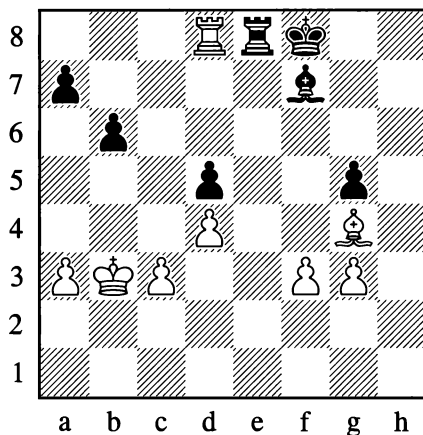
32.♞h7+ ♕g8 33.♞xf7 ♙xf7

Taking with the king wouldn't help: 33...♕xf7 34.♞h7+ ♕f6 35.♞xb7 ♞h8 36.♞xa7 ♞h2 37.♙f1 White is simply two pawns up.

34.♙d7 ♞d8 35.♙xf5

White is a pawn up and has the better pawn structure and more active pieces. The rest only shows the excellent technique of GM Rapport. Let's follow the rest of the game with minimal annotations.

35...♕g7 36.♞h7+ ♕f6 37.♙d3 ♞c8 38.♞h6+ ♕e7 39.♙f5 ♞c4 40.♕c2 b6 41.♕b3 ♞c7 42.♙g4 ♕f8 43.♞f6 ♕g7 44.♞d6 ♞e7 45.g3 ♕f8 46.a3 ♞e1 47.♞d8+ ♞e8

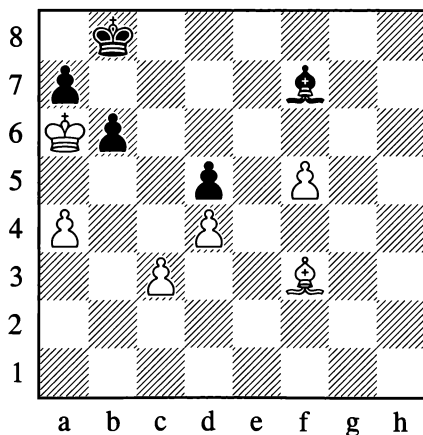
**48.♞xe8+**

Why not? White's rook might have been more active but only what remains on the board is important!

48...♕xe8 49.♕b4!

White finishes the game by penetrating with his king to a6.

49...♕d8 50.♕b5 ♕c7 51.♕a6 ♕b8 52.f4 gxf4 53.gxf4 ♙g6 54.f5 ♙e8 55.♙f3 ♙f7 56.a4



Black is in zugzwang:

56...♙g8

56...♕a8 57.c4, 56...♕c8 57.♕xa7 and 56...♙e8 57.♙xd5 are all hopeless for Black.

57. ♖h5

The f-pawn queens.

57... ♖c7 58. ♖xa7

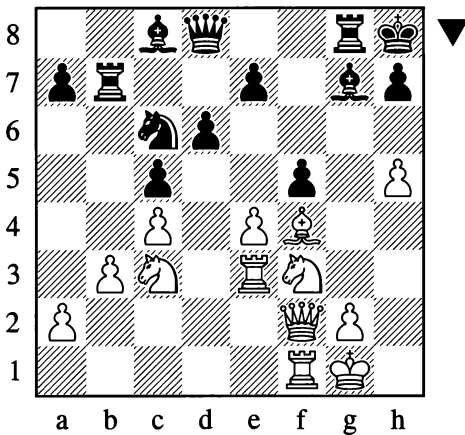
Black resigned.

1–0

Rapport did not capture the d6-knight because it was superior to the g3-bishop or because it was a great defender. He took the knight only because it won him the crucial tempo he needed to play h2-h4 and seize the initiative. Black got so scared of the incoming attack that he immediately succumbed to a bad endgame and the rest was just suffering.

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Magnus Carlsen

Saint Louis 2019



Carlsen wants to play ...e7-e5, to strengthen his control on the d4-outpost and open the seventh rank for the b7-rook. However, ...e7-e5 would restrict his dark-squared bishop. Therefore, it makes a lot of sense to get rid of it.

22... ♖xc3!

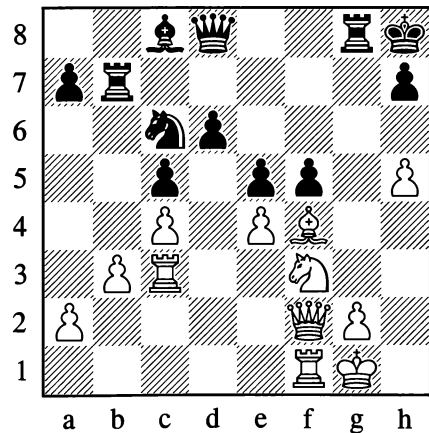
Let us ponder for a second: was the c3-knight a superior piece compared to the g7-bishop? Not at all. Granted, the knight wasn't terrible,

but it wasn't performing any impressive specific tasks either. The bishop on the other hand was protecting its king and controlled several important squares along the long diagonal. Furthermore, if circumstances were to allow such a thing, the bishop could have had a bright future placed on the d4-outpost.

Why was taking on c3 the strongest move then? The crucial tempo won by capturing a piece is the answer! White was threatening e4-e5 himself, so there was no time to waste.

To illustrate, if Black tried the tempting 22... ♖d4? then 23.e5! would stop ...e7-e5, leaving the c8-bishop and the b7-rook out of play. The game becomes a total mess, whereas Carlsen's move leads to a decisive advantage.

23. ♖xc3 e5

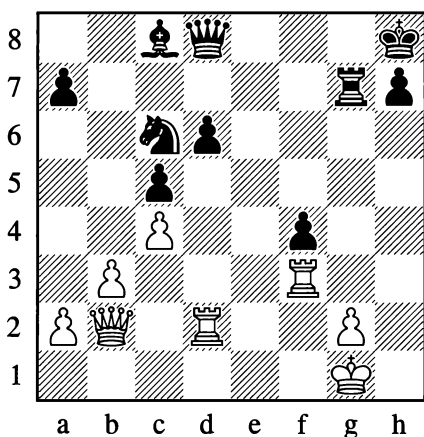


24. ♖d3

In a desperate position, MVL correctly tries to complicate matters.

If 24. ♖c1 Black would simply play 24... f4, intending ...♖b7-g7, and his attack is irresistible.

24... exf4 25. ♖b2† ♖bg7 26. h6 fxe4 27. ♖d2 exf3 28. hxg7† ♖xg7 29. ♖xf3



29...Wg5!

Carlsen ignores the threat on his d6-pawn and activates his queen.

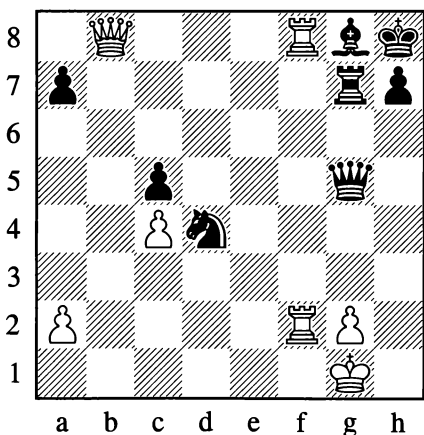
30.Bdf2

If 30...Bxd6, then 30...Qd4 31.Bf2 Bb7 and Black gets a crushing attack by placing the bishop on its dream diagonal.

30...Qd4 31.Bxf4 Bf5

Black is totally winning and Carlsen put the game away without any trouble.

32.b4 Bc6 33.Bf8+ Bg8 34.bxc5 dxc5
35.Wb8



35...We3

By using all his pieces actively while at the same time keeping them protected, Black prevents the opponent's attacking possibilities and creates dangerous threats of his own around White's king.

36.Wd6 Wc1+ 37.Qh2 Wg5 38.Wd5 Wh4+
39.Qg1 We7 40.Wh5 We3 41.Wh4 Qe2+
42.Qh1 Wc1+ 43.Bf1 Qg3+ 44.Qg1 We3+

White resigned in view of: 45.Bf2 We1+
46.Bf1 Qe2+ 47.Qh1 Wxh4#

0-1

A dominating display by Magnus Carlsen. After realizing he had no time to waste improving his bishop and decided on 22...Bxc3! the game was effectively over. If he had waited a single move, then White would have been the one achieving e4-e5 and the game would have taken a completely different turn.

Sometimes, chess is that unforgiving. Everything could rely on a single tempo. A timely exchange can be the means of winning that crucial bit of time needed to develop our initiative.

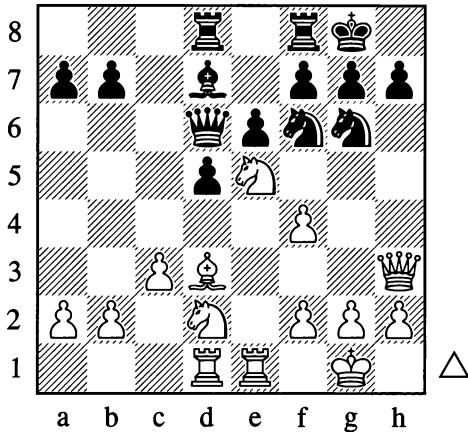
Destroying the King's Shelter

Exchanging pieces to destroy or weaken the opponent's king position is a commonly used tool when conducting an attack. The most prosaic way to present such cases would be to show, for example, White taking a knight on f6 with Black having castled short and being forced to take back with the g-pawn. The same rationale is behind the exchange sacrifices taking place on c3 in various variations of the Sicilian.

Another typical motif of the same kind is showcased in the following game:

Amir Bagheri – Myagmarsuren Gunbayar

Beijing (rapid) 2008



16. ♖xg6!

White parts with his strong bishop to damage the structure in front of the opponent's king.

16...hxg6

The transformation of the structure denies Black the ability to control the crucial g5-square or stop an attack coming down the h-file.

16...fxg6 is not possible: 17. ♖xd7 ♜xd7 18. ♜xe6† The extra pawn coupled with the opponent's weakness on d5 gives White a completely winning position.

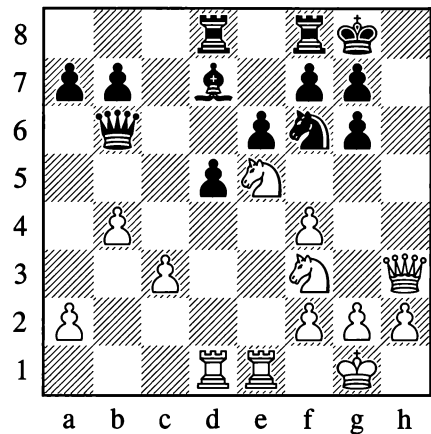
17. ♘df3

Intending to transfer the knight to g5. A simple and efficient way of attacking when the opponent's g-pawns are doubled.

17...♜b6 18. b4?!

An unnecessary waste of time.

White should have continued with his plan, ignoring the opponent's threat on the b2-pawn. After 18. ♘g5! ♜xb2 19. ♖d3! ♙e8 20. ♜h4 ♜c8 21. ♖h3 ♘h5 22. g4 White wins.

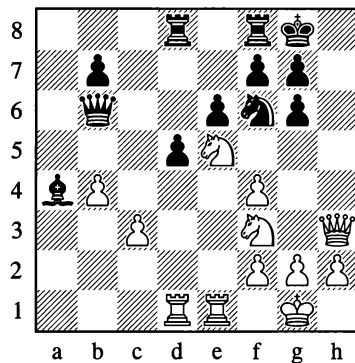


18...♙a4

18...a5!

Black needs to open some files on the queenside if he is to ever obtain any counterplay before getting checkmated.

19. a3 axb4 20. axb4 ♙a4



21. ♖d3

Trying to get to the h-file.

Another option is: 21. ♖d4 ♜a8 22. ♘g5 ♙b5 23. ♘g4 ♘h5 With a stubborn defence.

21...♙b5 22. ♖de3 d4!

Black absolutely must play actively.

23. ♘xd4 ♖xd4! 24. cxd4 ♜xd4

Even though Black doesn't have enough compensation, a defensive effort like this could have made White's task considerably harder. Defending actively is almost always the defender's best bet.

19. ♖d4 ♙c2

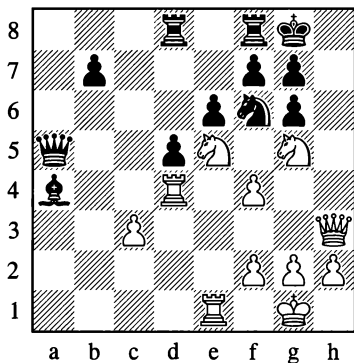
19... ♙b5 20. ♘g5 a5

Black is too late in seeking his counterplay:

21. a4! ♙xa4 22. bxa5

Getting the black queen further away from the kingside.

22... ♖xa5

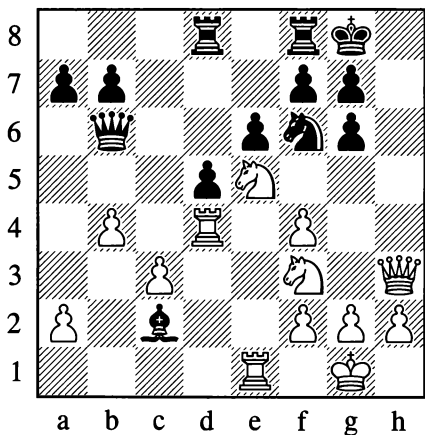


23. f5!

Intending ♖h4.

23... exf5 24. ♖h4 ♘h5 25. ♖xh5! gxh5 26. ♗xh5

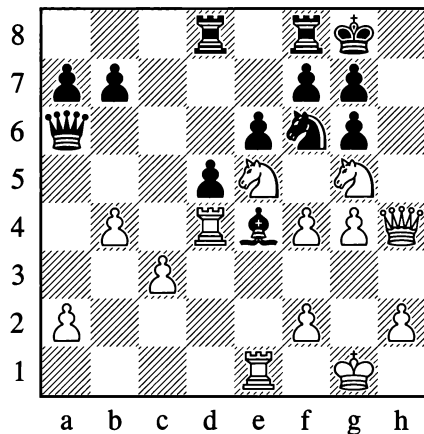
With a forced mate in two. Note how if the black queen was still on b6 she could have saved the day by suddenly swinging to h6.



20. ♘g5 ♙f5?

Making White's task even easier, but Black was lost anyway.

21. g4 ♙e4 22. ♗h4 ♖a6



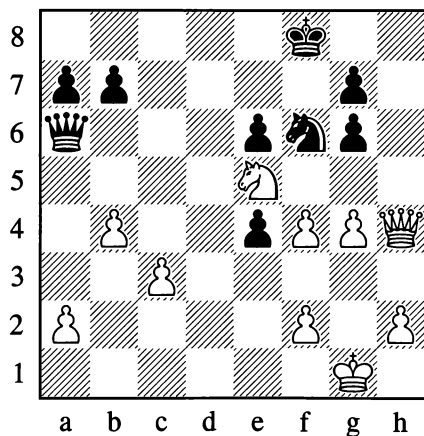
23. ♖xe4!

White crashes through with a series of beautiful blows.

23... dxe4 24. ♘gxf7! ♖xf7 25. ♖xd8†

White is completely winning.

25... ♖f8 26. ♖xf8† ♙xf8

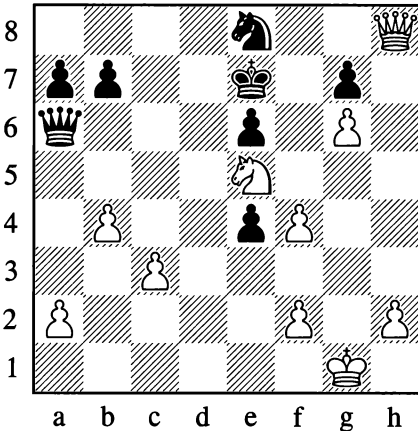


27. ♘xg6†

An even stronger continuation would be:

27. ♗h8† ♘g8 28. ♘xg6† ♙f7 29. ♘e5† ♙f8
30. ♗h5 ♘h6 31. g5 White wins.

27...♔f7 28.♖e5† ♕e7 29.g5 ♘d5 30.g6†
♜f6 31.♞h8 ♜e8



32.♞g8

White does not allow his opponent any time to breathe.

32...♞b5 33.♞f7† ♕d8 34.c4 ♞a4 35.♞xb7
♞d1† 36.♔g2 ♜c7 37.♞b8†

Black resigned.

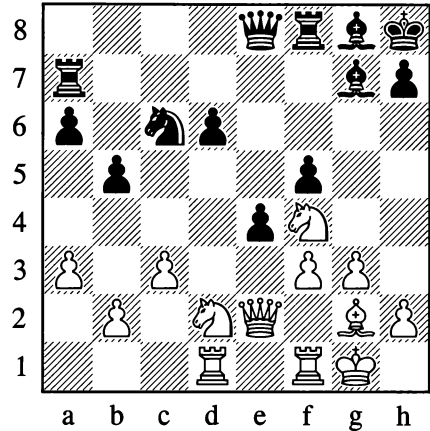
1–0

After 16.♙xg6 the black king's position was permanently weak. Black could have tried to obtain some counterplay with desperate measures, but it wouldn't be enough. That's why this type of operation is so terribly strong. Unlike most cases when an attack is temporary, the attacking chances yielded by damaging the opponent's king shelter are permanent.

In the following game, the young Ukrainian grandmaster, Kirill Shevchenko, finds a forcing way to destroy the opposing king's sanctuary.

Aleksander Delchev – Kirill Shevchenko

Struga 2021



26...e3!

An important move in Black's operation that limits the activity of White's pieces.

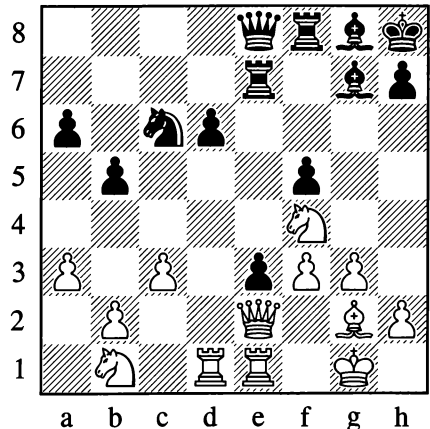
27.♞fe1

After 27.♜b1 ♕c4 28.♜d3 f4! with the threat of ...♜c6-e5, Black wins.

27...♞e7

Black brings all his forces into action while getting rid of the pin to the e3-pawn.

28.♜b1



28...♙c4!

The light-squared bishop activates itself while vacating the g8-square for a rook and proudly declares its intentions to help the e-pawn march even further down the board.

29.♖c2

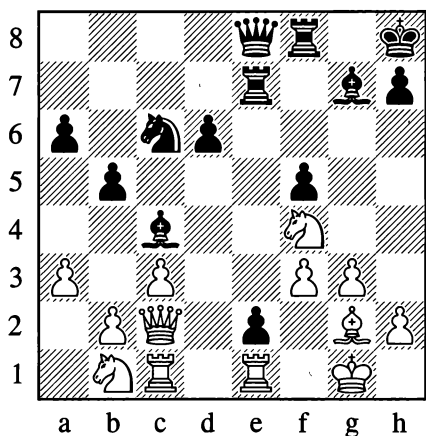
29.♘d3 f4! is again leading to a massacre.

29...e2!

Black creates maximum confusion inside the white camp.

30.♞c1

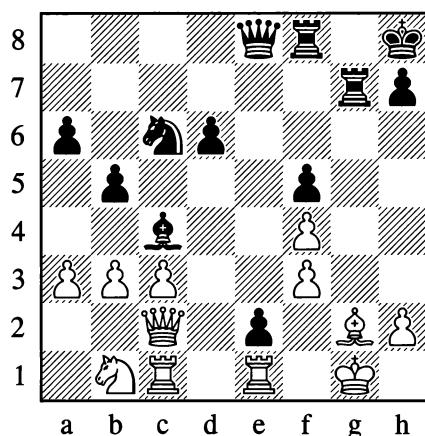
If 30.♞xd6, then 30...♙e5 31.♞d2 ♙xd6 32.♞xd6 ♞d7 and Black wins.

**30...♙h6!**

With the white knight on f4 and the rook on c1 on the same diagonal, Black seizes his chance to destroy the shelter of the white king.

31.b3

After 31.♞d2 ♘e5 32.♞c2 ♘d3 White's position is in shambles.

31...♙xf4 32.gxf4 ♞g7

With a few simple but powerful moves Black managed to destroy the opponent's defensive fortress. White saw no hope and decided to resign.

Otherwise, the game would end after: 33.♙f2 ♞xg2†! 34.♙xg2 ♞e3 35.♘d2 ♞g8† 36.♙h1 ♙d5 White's position has completely collapsed. **0-1**

A truly spectacular sequence, using every ounce of energy the black pieces had to offer. Once again, the destruction of the shelter of the white king was so powerful, it decided the game on the spot.

Be on the lookout for chances like these! As you saw, you might be able to decide the game within just a few moves if you find a way to permanently weaken the position of your opponent's king.

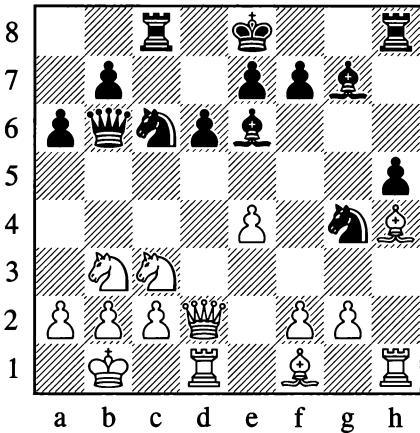
Opening a File

Sometimes, an exchange might be made in order to open a file against the opponent's king.

Magnus Carlsen – Alexander Grischuk

Monte Carlo (rapid) 2011

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 d6 3.♘f3 a6 4.d4 cxd4
5.♘xd4 ♘f6 6.♙e3 ♘g4 7.♙g5 h6 8.♙h4 g5
9.♙g3 ♙g7 10.♚d2 ♘c6 11.♘b3 ♙e6 12.h4
gxh4 13.♙xh4 ♚b6 14.0-0-0 ♝c8 15.♙b1
h5



16.♘d5!

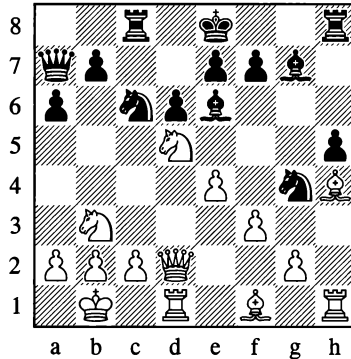
A standard move in such positions that puts Black in a dilemma. If he takes the d5-knight, then White will recapture with the e-pawn and create a semi-open file which can be used to put pressure on the backward pawn on e7. At the same time, White will gain supremacy on the light squares as he will possess an unopposed light-squared bishop. Otherwise, Black must tolerate White's mighty knight at this extremely active post.

Note that when a player makes a fianchetto on the kingside, it is typical for his e-pawn to become a target if it remains at its starting position.

16...♙xd5

It was even worse to try tolerating the active knight:

16...♚a7? 17.f3



17...♘ge5

After 17...♘f6 18.♙xf6 ♙xf6 19.♘xf6+ exf6 20.♚f4 Black is completely helpless due to his ruined pawn structure and exposed king.
18.♙f2 ♚b8 19.♘b6 ♝d8 20.♚g5

White is completely winning.

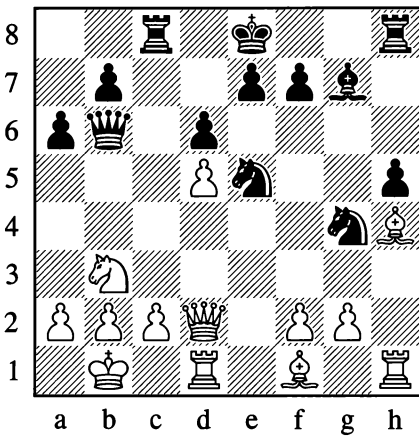
20...♙f6 21.♝xh5!

A cherry on top, exploiting Black's weak back rank.

17.exd5

The e-file is open and White will use that to put the black king under tremendous pressure. Black can't run to the kingside because of the open h-file and he can't go to the queenside because he has already moved his a8-rook. The black monarch has nowhere to hide.

17...♘ce5

**18.♞e1!**

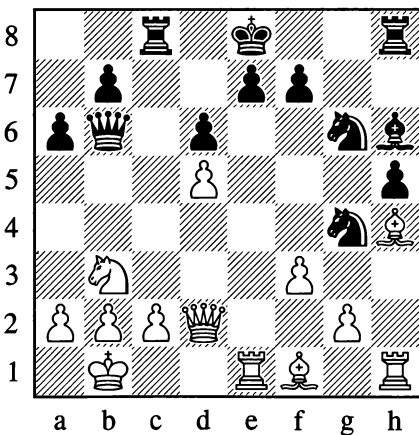
Simple chess. Carlsen initiates pressure on the backward e7-pawn.

18...♜g6

Exchanging the annoying h4-bishop doesn't help: 18...♞f6 19.f3 ♞xh4 20.♞xh4 ♜f6 21.♞b4 ♞c7 22.f4 After the black knight is driven away from e5, the precarious position of the black king will become obvious.

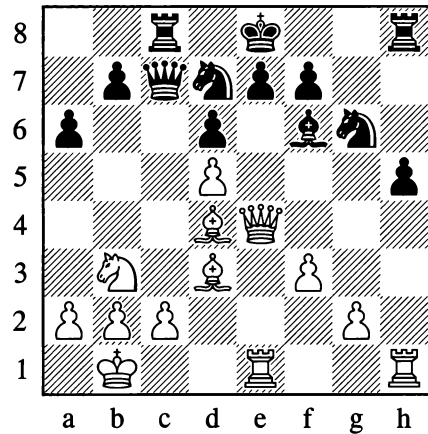
19.f3 ♞h6

If 19...♞f6 20.♞xf6 ♜xf6 21.f4, by preventing Black from playing ...♜e5, closing the e-file, White obtains a huge advantage.

**20.♞e2 ♜4e5**

In the event of 20...♜e3, the black knight is trapped: 21.♞f2 ♞xc2 22.♞xc2 ♜xc2 23.♞xb6 ♜xe1 24.♞f2 ♜xg2 25.♞xg2 With an extra piece.

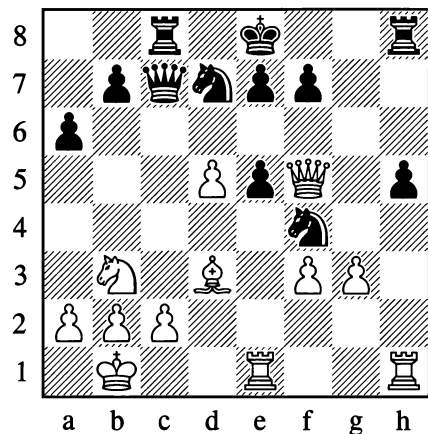
21.♞f2 ♞c7 22.♞e4 ♞g7 23.♞d4 ♞f6
24.♞e2 ♜d7 25.♞d3



Carlsen has expertly regrouped his pieces, placing all of them at their most active positions.

25...♞e5 26.♞f5 ♜f4 27.♞xe5 dxe5

27...♜xd3? is even worse: 28.cxd3 dxe5 29.♞c1 ♞b8 30.♞xc8+ ♞xc8 31.♞c1 ♞b8 32.♜c5 ♜xc5 33.♞xc5 White wins.

28.g3

28...♟xd3

Grischuk decides to eliminate the powerful bishop.

It was better to go for: 28...♟xd5 29.♞xh5 ♞g8 30.♞h3! e6 31.♞h8 ♞xh8 32.♞xh8† ♔e7 33.♞h4† ♚7f6 34.g4. However, given the vulnerable position of the opponent's king, White's advantage is still undeniable.

29.♞c4

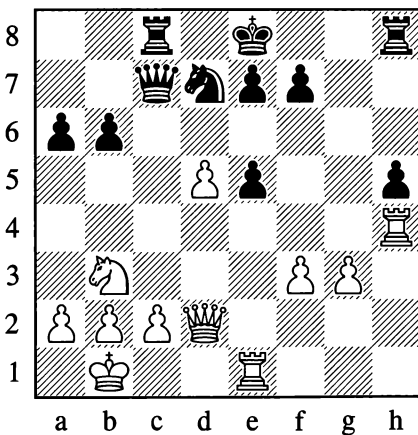
White has a huge advantage due to his better pawn structure, safer king, and more active pieces.

29...♞c4

With his king stuck in the centre, Grischuk offers the exchange of queens.

30.♞d2

It was clear that Carlsen wasn't going to accept the offer.

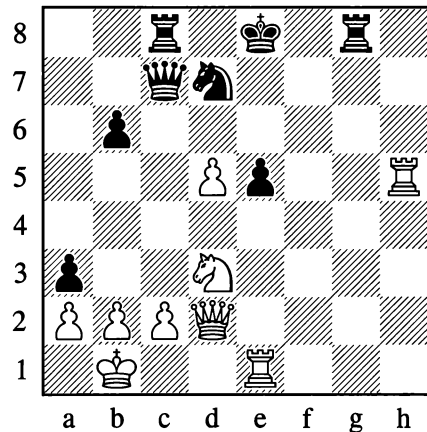
30...b6 31.♞h4 ♞c7**32.f4!**

Once again, White opens lines against the opponent's king.

32...f6

32...exf4? runs into the deadly 33.d6.

33.g4! a5 34.♞xh5 ♞g8 35.g5 a4 36.♟c1 a3 37.gxf6 exf6 38.fxe5 fxe5 39.♟d3



The black king is finally caught in the open. The game is over.

39...axb2 40.♟xe5 ♟xe5 41.d6 ♞d7 42.♞d5 ♟f8 43.♞xe5 ♞c5 44.♞f1†

The black queen is lost, and checkmate is going to follow shortly afterwards. Grischuk resigned.

1-0

After the change of structure with 16.♟d5! ♟xd5 17.exd5, the black king was forced to remain in the centre but couldn't feel any safety on e8 either with the e-file being open. At the same time, the h8-rook was stranded from the rest of the black pieces.

Some moves later, Carlsen once again tried to open the e-file with 32.f4!. Black denied him with 32...f6 but, in the process, he created even more weaknesses around his king. After a few more pawn breaks, the black king was eventually caught in the open.

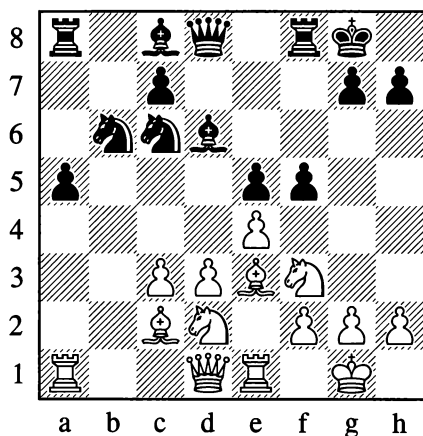
Attacking on a Colour Complex

Another way of getting permanent attacking chances is by obtaining dominance over a colour complex. This type of dominance is typically correlated both to the pawn structure and the assortment of pieces that remain on the board. That means if your opponent places his pawns in such a way that weaknesses are created around a whole colour complex, then, with the right exchanges, you might be able to assert your dominance over said complex for the rest of the game.

Magnus Carlsen – Diptayan Ghosh

Internet (rapid) 2017

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.d3 d6 6.c3 ♙e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♞e1 b5 9.♙c2
d5 10.♘bd2 d4 11.♘b3 a5 12.a4 bxa4
13.♞xa4 dxc3 14.bxc3 ♘d7 15.♙e3 ♘b6
16.♞a1 ♙d6 17.♘bd2 f5



Black is weak on the light squares, and he has just weakened his kingside further by playing ...f7-f5. Carlsen immediately exploits Black's last move.

18.♙xb6!

Carlsen not only gives up the bishop pair but also improves the opponent's pawn structure.

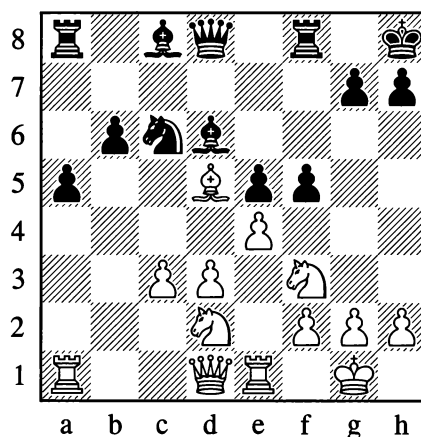
However, in this position, dynamic factors, such as the vulnerable position of the black king, are more critical than static factors, such as the two bishops.

Even more importantly, the black knight on b6 was protecting some crucial light squares. After chopping the knight off, the whole colour complex becomes White's for the taking.

18...cxb6 19.♙b3†

Gaining a valuable tempo.

19...♙h8 20.♙d5



20...♞c7

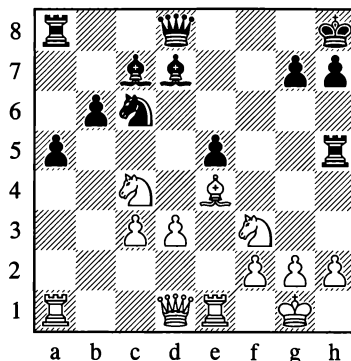
Also inadequate was:

20...♙d7 21.♘c4 ♙c7 22.exf5!

Opening the position even more.

22...♞xf5 23.♙e4 ♞h5

After 23...♞f8 24.♘cxe5! ♘xe5 25.♙xa8
White wins an exchange.



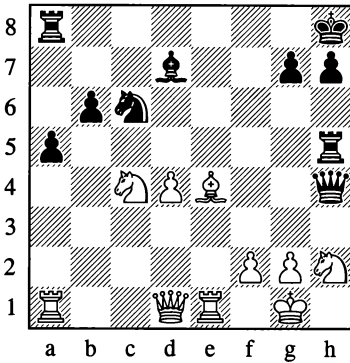
24.d4!

The position explodes and Black is caught in complete discoordination.

24...exd4 25.cxd4 ♖xh2†

If 25...♖h6 26.d5, White wins a piece.

26.♙xh2 ♚h4



Black's desperate attempt at counterplay is swiftly refuted by:

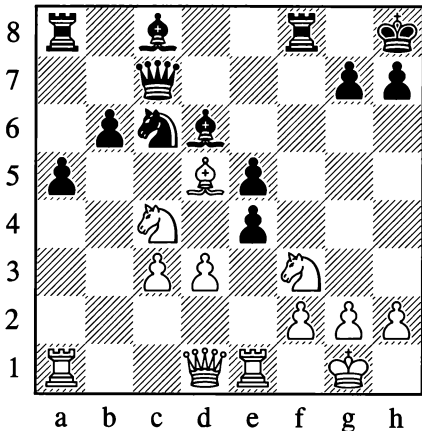
27.♚xh5! ♚xh5 28.♙xb6 ♖d8 29.♙xd7 ♙xd4 30.♖ab1!

White wins.

21.♙c4

White's pieces wasted no time in occupying the crucial light squares that were once defended by the b6-knight.

21...fxe4



22.♙g5!

Carlsen does not allow his opponent to breathe. The time has come for a full-scale attack on the black king.

22...exd3 23.♙xh7!

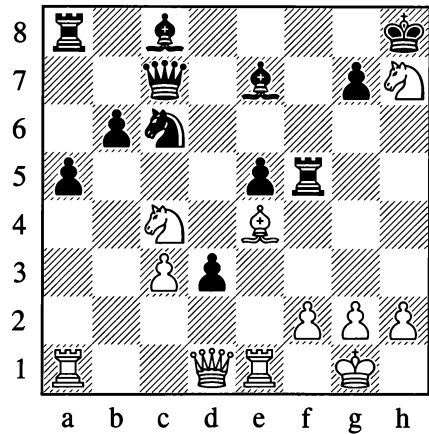
The killer blow. Black gets destroyed on the light squares.

23...♖f5

23...♙xh7?? 24.♚h5#

24.♙e4 ♙e7

If 24...♙xh7, then White can play 25.g4, winning the pinned rook.



25.♚xd3

25.♙e3! was a cleaner way to get the job done: 25...d2 26.♖f1 ♖f4 (After 26...g6 27.♙xf5 ♙xf5 28.♙xf5 gxf5 29.♚h5 White wins.) 27.♚h5 The mating threats against the black king are unstoppable.

25...g6

25...♖h5 was a better chance, but it still gets refuted by some pretty lines: 26.♙xc6! ♚xc6 27.♙xe5 ♙f5 (In the event of 27...♙a6 28.♚d1 ♚e8 29.♚c2! ♖h6 30.♚f5! g6 31.♚f3 ♙xh7 32.♙g4 ♖h5 33.♙f6† White wins.) 28.♚e2 ♚e8 29.g4 ♙xh7 30.gxh5 Black has no compensation for the material deficit.

26. ♖e3

The game is over.

26... ♜d7 27. ♜c4 ♙c5 28. ♖xf5 gxf5 29. ♖f6

Black resigned.

1–0

No matter how used we are to Carlsen creating masterpieces, this is still an impressive effort for a rapid game. 18. ♙xb6! was an excellent choice, even if at first glance the e3-bishop doesn't seem inferior to the b6-knight. In reality, since all of Black's weaknesses are on light squares the bishop was useless. The knight on the other hand was an important defender. It protected the c4- and d5-squares, which White used to great effect by establishing a monster bishop on d5 and a beast of a knight on c4.

To generalize, after the exchange White had three minor pieces at his disposal that were able to control the light squares, while Black only had two and a useless dark-squared bishop. This exact method is the most common way of dominating a colour complex. You leave yourself with an extra piece regarding the control of a given colour of squares and your opponent with a purposeless opposite-coloured bishop. Once again, this operation is extremely powerful due to the permanent nature of its effects.

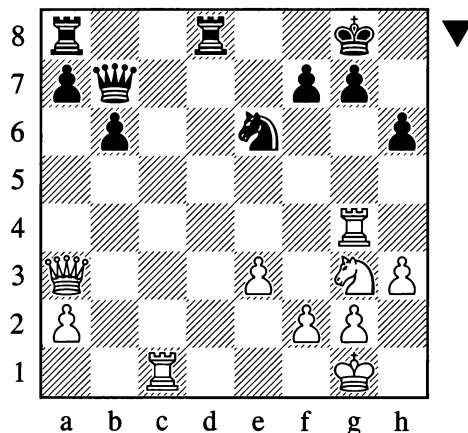
Defusing an Attack

Honing our defensive skills in chess is as important as developing our attacking ones. Our position is not always ripe for an attack, and it often happens that we find ourselves on the back foot. This means that mastering defensive techniques can be an extremely valuable tool in our arsenal.

One of the most important techniques of such nature is exchanging the opponent's attacking pieces. Doing so will very often slow down, or even altogether eliminate, their attack.

Hikaru Nakamura – Viswanathan Anand

Zagreb 2019

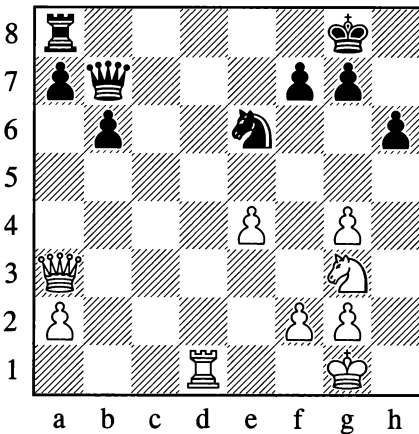


Hoping for a direct attack against the opponent's king, Nakamura has transferred his rook to the g4-square. Anand takes immediate action before the opponent's attack becomes dangerous.

23... ♜d5!

A timely rook lift. By taking advantage of his rook mobility, Black intends to transfer it to the kingside to trade it for the threatening g4-rook.

24. e4 ♜g5 25. ♜d1 ♜xg4 26. hxxg4



26...♖c7

Trying to push his queenside pawn majority with 26...b5 27.♖b3 a5 could even give Black a slight advantage.

27.♘f5 ♜d8 28.♞xd8† ♞xd8 29.♞xa7 ♞d1†
30.♙h2 ♞xg4 31.♞xb6 ♞xe4

Almost everything got exchanged. The position is dead equal.

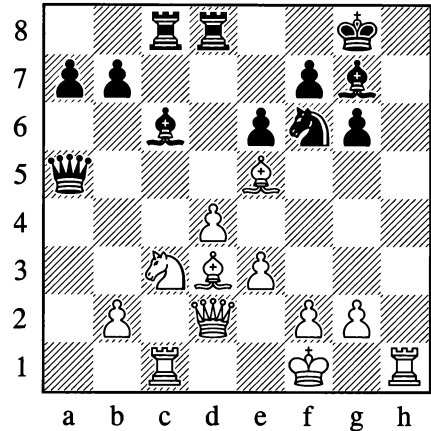
...½–½

Even if at the starting position it looked like White had some attacking chances against Black's kingside, two moves later it was clear Black had no problems. That's how effective exchanging your opponent's attackers can be in blunting his attack.

The next game features a similar idea but in a slightly more complex scenario:

Loek van Wely – Magnus Carlsen

Wijk aan Zee 2016



White controls the open h-file with his rook and has a strong, active bishop on a central outpost. However, his position is not without drawbacks. His rooks are not connected, and his king is not totally safe. Black's c6-bishop is very strong, exerting a lot of pressure on the white kingside. What is more, we should not ignore Black's queenside majority which increases in strength the closer we get to an endgame.

21...♘g4!?

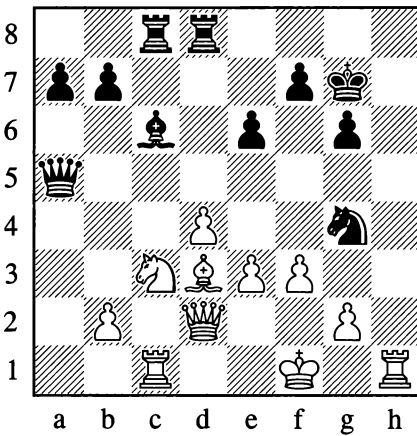
Carlsen begins his operation by exchanging the opponent's mighty bishop.

Also good was: 21...♘h5 22.♞xg7 ♘xg7 After exchanging the dark-squared bishops, Black's king is not weakened. On the contrary, he can use the option of playing ...♞h8 to try and seize the open h-file for himself. Moreover, since White's king is not in a good position, opening the centre with ...e6-e5 can be a good idea at the right time.

22.♞xg7

After 22.♞g3? e5! White is in trouble. Black is way too active.

22...♞xg7 23.f3



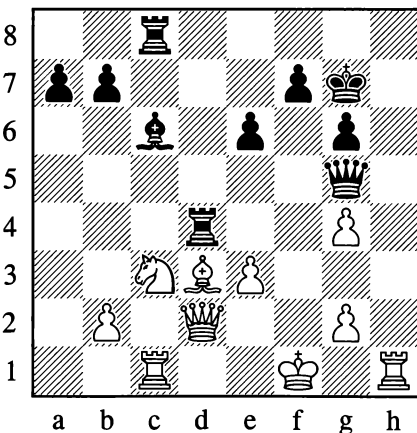
23...♙g5?

Carlsen slightly overestimates his attacking chances. However, bear in mind that to be number one in the world one has to take risks!

We should also point out that even though the move is tactically flawed, the mindset behind it is spot-on once again. If we have a chance to seize the initiative from our opponent and become the attacker ourselves, we should almost always take it.

23...♘f6 should have been played, maintaining equality. A future ...♙h8 will put the kibosh on White's attack.

24.f×g4 ♝xd4



25.♔e1!

Precise defence!

25.♝c2 would be met by 25...♝xg4 26.♘e4 ♙e5 27.♝c5 ♝xg2! 28.♙xg2 ♙xc5 and the position remains extremely complicated.

25...♙e5

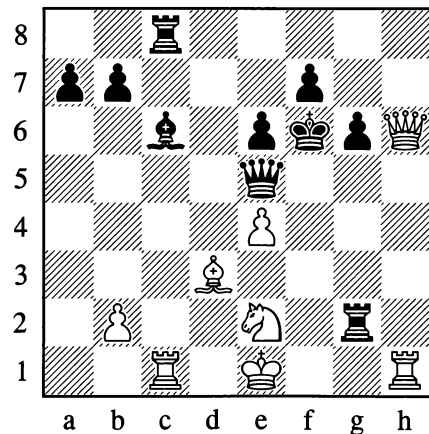
After 25...♝xg4 26.♘e4 ♙e7 27.♝c4! ♝d8 28.♙c3† e5 29.♝h2 White would start stabilizing his position and the extra piece is bound to eventually make its presence felt.

26.♘e2! ♝xg4 27.e4 ♝xg2?

Black should not have allowed White to penetrate his position via the h-file.

27...♝g5 was a more stubborn way to defend, but after 28.♘c3 ♝d8 29.♝h3 ♝d7 White would still have a significant advantage.

28.♙h6† ♔f6



29.♝c3?

In a winning but complicated position, Van Wely finally falters.

He could have obtained a huge advantage with:

29.♖h4†! ♜g5

After 29...♙g7 30.♖h7† ♜f6 31.♞f1† the game is over.

29...♞g5 would be simply met by 30.♞g1, when ♞xg5 followed by e4-e5† cannot be stopped.

What White probably missed was 29...g5 30.♖h3! and the g2-rook is trapped.

30.e5†! ♜g7 31.♖h7† ♜f8 32.♖h8† ♜e7 33.♖xc8

Black doesn't have any way to regain the huge material deficit.

29...♞d8!

The tables have turned. With the position becoming objectively balanced, Black has great practical compensation for the sacrificed piece.

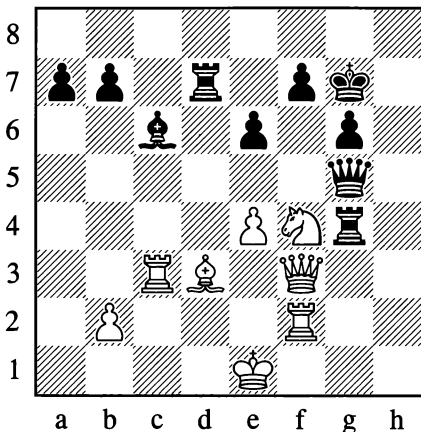
30.♖h3

In the event of 30.♖h4†, the main point of Black's previous move is revealed: 30...♖g5 31.e5† ♜g7 32.♖h7† ♜f8 33.♖h8† ♜e7 Compared to the previous note, the rook on d8 is defended by the black king and Black has no problems.

30...♖g5 31.♞f1† ♜g7 32.♖f3 ♞d7 33.♞f2 ♞g4 34.♙f4?

As it so often happens, the defender stumbles and the attacker gets the upper hand.

34.♞h2 would have kept the game unclear.



34...♖h4!

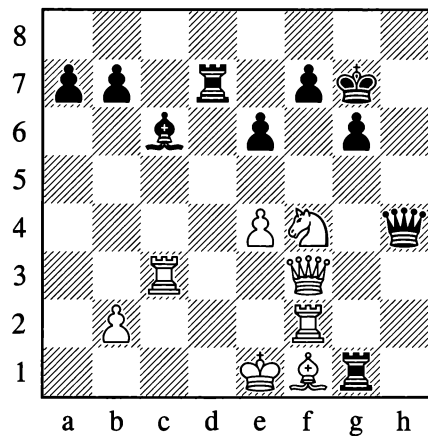
Black is following two of the most important principles of chess at the same time, activating his pieces as much as possible and disabling his opponent's.

35.♙e2?

Making Black's task even easier.

35.♙e2 ♙xe4 36.♙xe4 ♞xe4 37.♞e3 would have put up more stubborn resistance. However, Black still obtains a winning advantage after 37...♞a4!, refraining from exchanges and starting a decisive attack against the white king.

35...♞g1† 36.♙f1



36...♙g8

36...e5! was winning on the spot: 37.♙h3 (37.♙d5 would be met by 37...f5! and Black wins. White is paralyzed.) 37...♞g4 White's pawn on e4 falls and his position is completely lost.

37.♙e2??

37.♙g2 ♖xe4† 38.♖xe4 ♙xe4 39.♙e3 should have been played, but the black pawns should eventually decide the outcome.

Black ends the game with a simple combination:

37...♖xf1†! 38.♔xf1 ♜d1† 39.♕g2 ♙xe4

White resigned.

0–1

The starting position gave the impression that Black's king was under fire due to the excellent e5-bishop and the well-placed h1-rook. After Carlsen exchanged the bishop and moved his king to g7, he created the possibility for a future ...♖h8 which would completely defang the white attack.

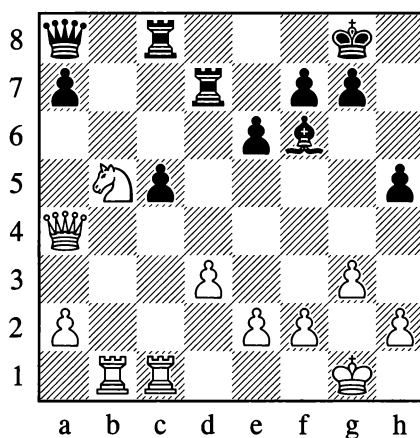
His choice to go for the attack with 23...♛g5? was objectively mistaken but instructive nonetheless. Top players will always try to seize the initiative when given the slightest chance.

We already saw two instances of the defender trying to exchange some lesser pieces but, of course, the most dangerous attacking piece is the queen. When trying to stop an attack against the king, the defender is always advised to go for a queen trade if possible.

Magnus Carlsen – Aryan Tari

Krasnaya Polyana 2021

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♙g2 dxc4 4.♛a4† c6
5.♛xc4 c5 6.b3 ♘f6 7.♙b2 ♙e7 8.♘f3 ♘c6
9.0–0 0–0 10.♘e5 ♘xe5 11.♙xe5 ♘d7
12.♙b2 ♜b8 13.♘c3 ♙f6 14.♞ab1 b6 15.b4
♙b7 16.♙xb7 ♞xb7 17.bxc5 ♘xc5 18.♙a3
♞c7 19.♞f1 ♞e8 20.♘b5 ♞d7 21.♙xc5
bxc5 22.♛a4 ♛a8 23.d3 h5 24.♞dc1 ♞c8



White has a better pawn structure but, since he's missing the bishop from the kingside fianchetto, he must be wary of a potential attack.

25.♘a3!

A dual-purpose move. Carlsen clears the b-file for his heavy pieces to penetrate the opponent's camp while at the same time transferring his knight to the c4-outpost. Note that in the event of the black rook leaving the seventh rank, White can manoeuvre with ♛b5-b7 or ♛a6-b7.

In addition, by controlling the c4-square, White can consider the possibility of ♛e4. Exchanging queens is all he needs for a safe advantage.

The immediate 25.♛e4? would be premature. After 25...♛xe4 26.dxe4 c4 Black's position would simply be better.

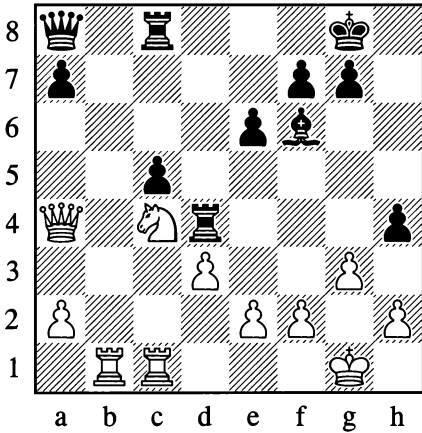
25...♞d4

25...♞dc7 26.♘c4 leaves Black with a passive position.

Also inadequate would be: 25...♞e7 26.♛e4! (26.♘c4 is another good option. After 26...♛d5 27.♘e3 ♛d8 28.♛e4 White retains a pleasant advantage.) 26...♛xe4 27.dxe4 ♞d7 28.♘c4 g5 29.♞b5 White doesn't need to

worry about his doubled e-pawns as they can't be attacked, and his strong knight blocking the c5-pawn guarantees him a much better game.

26. ♖c4 h4



27. ♙b5!

Since Black's hopes are pinned on launching an attack, White will try to exchange queens to obstruct the opponent's counterplay.

27. ♙b3 would not be precise due to 27... ♖d7 with an unclear battle.

27... ♙d5!

Placing the queen on d5 guarantees that if White wants to exchange Black will get to fix his structure with ...exd5. Moreover, the queen could try to refrain from the exchange completely with ...♙h5.

28. ♙b7 ♖d8 29. ♙xd5

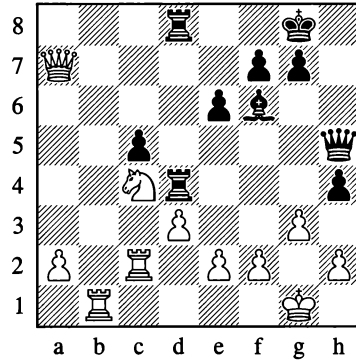
A good practical choice. White should take care of his king's safety instead of going pawn hunting.

The risky option would be:

29. ♙xa7

White's queen is temporarily out of action and that gives Black some tactical possibilities.

29... ♙h5 30. ♖c2



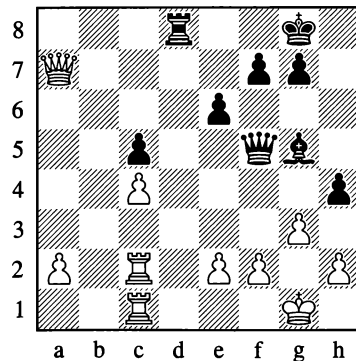
30... ♖xc4!!

A brilliant exchange sacrifice, seizing the initiative.

31. dxc4 ♙f5 32. ♖bc1

In case of 32. ♖cc1 ♖d4 33. e3 hxc3 34. hxc3 ♖xe3 35. fxe3 ♙f3 White cannot escape the draw by perpetual check.

32... ♖g5



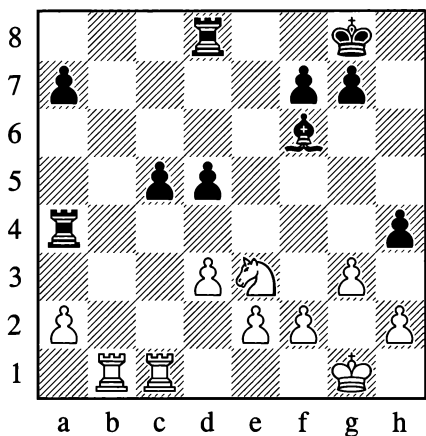
33. ♙c7

After 33. e3?! ♙f3 Black's compensation is suddenly more than sufficient.

33... ♖d4

Black has at least enough compensation for the sacrificed exchange.

29...exd5 30.♖e3 ♜a4



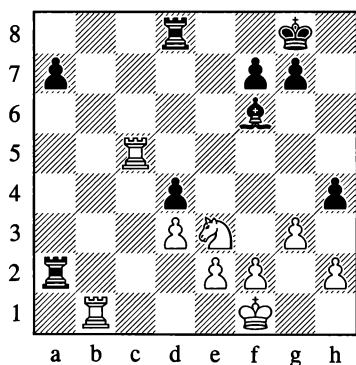
Both players have played excellently so far. White managed to get the queens off, but Black in turn got to activate his pieces and take away the c4-outpost from the white knight. The position remains objectively balanced.

31.♞c2

Carlsen wants to keep the game going.

The forcing try leads to a draw:

31.♞xc5 ♜xa2 32.♕f1 d4



33.♖g4

White staying out of trouble.

The tempting 33.♖c4 is objectively OK but practically a bit awkward for White after 33...♞e8 34.♞e1 h3!. The knight on c4

might be pretty, but the weakness of the white king is a permanent problem.

33...h3 34.hxg3 ♞e8 35.♞f5 ♞exe2 36.♖xf6† gxf6 37.♞xf6

With an equal endgame.

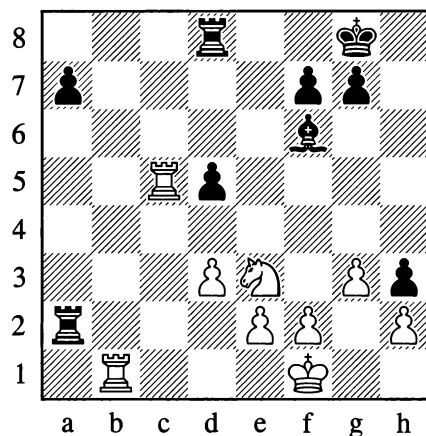
31...h3 32.♕f1 ♖d4

Black has obtained enough counterplay for equality.

33.♖f5 ♖f6 34.♖e3 ♖d4 35.♖f5 ♖f6 36.♞xc5

Of course, Carlsen never gives away a draw before he squeezes out every last chance of getting the full point.

36...♞xa2 37.♖e3



37...a5?!

A better choice but a tough find was:

37...♞e8!

Black wants to force White to take on d5 with his rook, thus keeping the f6-bishop safe, and at the same time pin the e3-knight, keeping it out of the game.

38.♞xd5 a5!

After luring the rook to d5, Black pushes his passed pawn to create counterplay.

Preventing White from playing ♞h5 with 38...g6 is not accurate. After 39.♞c5 a5 40.♕e1 a4 41.♞c2 ♞a3 42.♖d5 White keeps an edge.

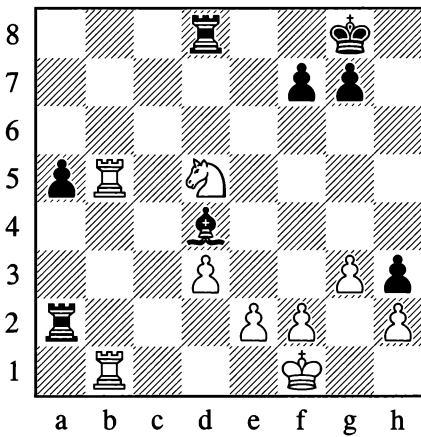
39.♖h5 a4 40.♖xh3 a3

Black has strong compensation for the material deficit. The white rook is severely misplaced on h3.

38.♟xd5 ♙d4?

After 38...a4! 39.♟xf6† gxf6 a draw would still have been the most likely result.

39.♖cb5



39...a4??

Black blunders in a difficult position and the game ends abruptly.

Black had to play 39...♖e8 and White would still need to show some technique.

40.♟e7†

After 40...♔f8 (40...♔h7 41.♖h5#) 41.♟c6, Black has an unenviable choice to make between back-rank checkmate and the loss of a piece.

1–0

Both players handled the first part of this skirmish in textbook fashion. Carlsen tried to exchange queens so that his structural superiority would be underlined while Tari on the other hand played for an attack and used his attacking chances to force the repair of his structure.

In the end, because of his opponent's excellent efforts, White's advantage in the endgame was only a practical one. Objectively, Black still had enough initiative to secure a draw. However, as we saw, it wasn't that easy. The side with the better structure eventually prevailed after the queens were exchanged.

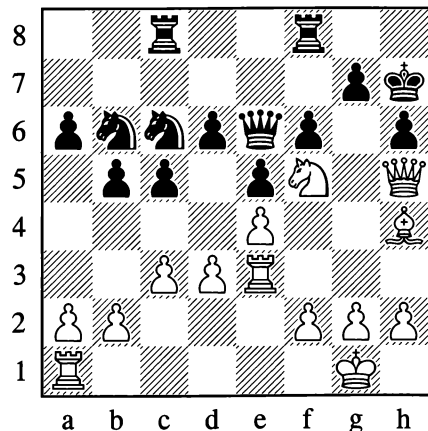
In most cases, in exchange for an attack, the defender will have some long-term trumps. If they don't, then the situation is completely one-sided. Hence, it's a common narrative to have a defender patiently staving off an attack trying to prove their eventual positional advantage. When the attack is over, it's time for the long-term features of the position to come into the spotlight.

That's exactly what happens in the following game:

Mateusz Bartel – Magnus Carlsen

Germany 2008

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.♟c3 e5 4.♙c4 ♙e7
5.♟d5 d6 6.d3 ♟f6 7.♟xe7 ♖xe7 8.c3 0–0
9.♙g5 h6 10.♙h4 a6 11.0–0 ♙e6 12.♙xe6
♖xe6 13.♖e1 ♖ac8 14.♟d2 ♟d7 15.♟c4
b5 16.♟e3 ♟b6 17.♟f5 ♔h7 18.♖h5 f6
19.♖e3



White's pieces are targeting the black kingside and, thanks to his well-placed knight, the attack looks quite dangerous. However, note that if White's attack fails, his bishop will be useless against the rock-solid black structure. What is more, Black has a space advantage and chances to create counterplay in the centre and on the queenside.

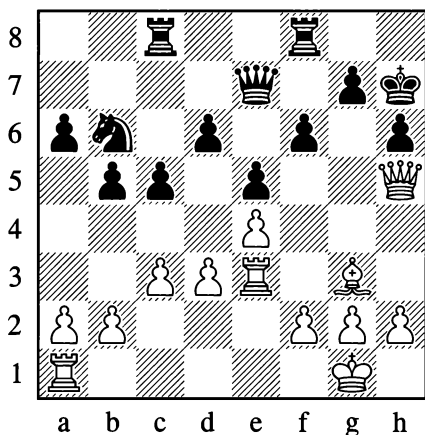
19...♖e7!

First things first. Black needs to exchange the strong white knight.

20.♗xe7

20.♗g3?? would be a blunder due to 20...g5 21.♗f5 ♗xf5 22.exf5 ♖xf5 23.♙g3 ♖g6 and Black wins.

20...♖xe7 21.♙g3



21...♖f7!

Time to trade queens! White's attack has evaporated.

22.♖f5†

After 22.♖e2 d5! Black seizes the initiative in the centre.

22...♖g6 23.♖xg6†

In the event of 23.♖f3 ♖fd8 24.♖ae1 d5, Black would have an advantage in space and the more active pieces.

23.♖e6 could be met by 23...♖cd8 intending ...♖fe8 and ...d6-d5. If 24.f4, then after 24...♖fe8 25.♖h3 ♗a4 26.♖b1 c4 Black is once again better.

23...♗xg6

White's attack is gone and his bishop is restricted by the black structure. Carlsen slowly increases his advantage.

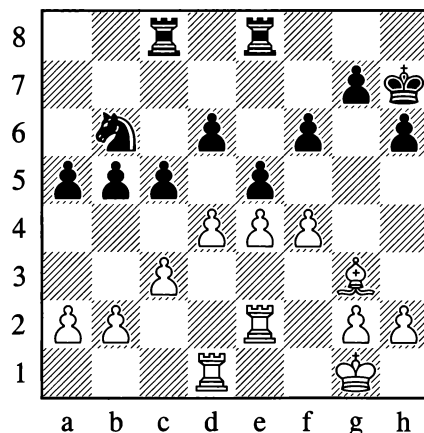
24.f4 ♖fe8 25.♖d1 ♗h7 26.♖e2 a5!

More space!

27.d4?!

White tries to open the position for his bishop, but it's going to backfire.

He should have pursued a waiting policy with 27.♗f2 and let Black enjoy his slight advantage.



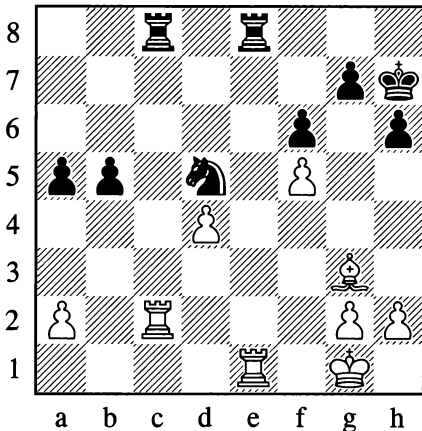
27...exd4! 28.cxd4 c4!

The point. Black obtains a pawn majority on the queenside.

29.f5 c3!

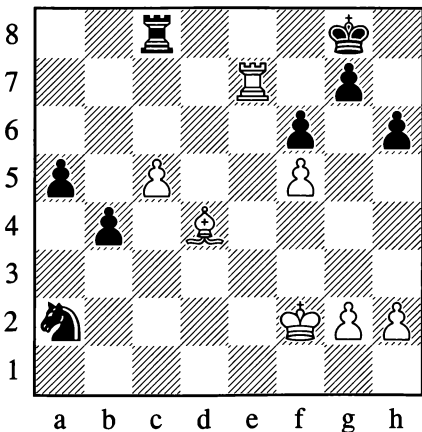
Instead of defending the d6-pawn Carlsen turns to active play. It turns out that the pawn on d6 is untouchable anyway. Of course, making such a decision is possible only when accompanied by accurate calculation.

30.bxc3 ♖a4 31.♞de1 ♜xc3 32.♞c2 d5
33.exd5 ♜xd5



The mighty knight on d5, the queenside pawn majority, and the weak pawns on d4 and f5 guarantee an advantage for Black.

34.♞c5 ♞xc5 35.dxc5 ♞c8 36.♙f2 b4 37.♙d4
♜c3 38.♞e7 ♙g8 39.♙f2 ♜xa2



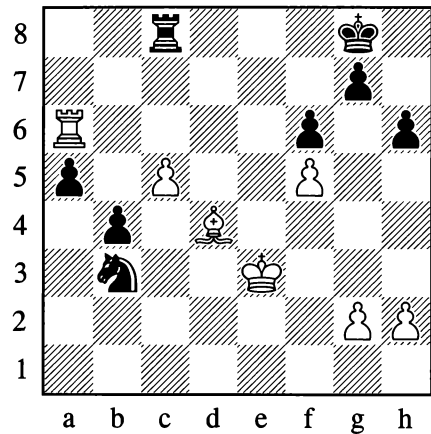
40.♙e3?

This move blocks the bishop's retreat and Bartel loses his last chance to resist stubbornly.

He should have chosen: 40.♞a7! ♜c1! 41.♙f1!! Astonishingly, this is the only correct square for the king. (The more natural 41.♙f3? loses to

41...♜b3 42.♙e3 ♜xc5 43.♞xa5 ♜d3 44.♞b5 ♞c2 with the threat of ...♜e1†. Black wins.) 41...♜b3 42.♙e3 White could have continued to resist.

40...♜c1 41.♞e6 ♜b3 42.♞a6



42...♞e8† 43.♞e6 ♙f7

Everything gets exchanged, and the pawn endgame is hopeless. White resigned.

0–1

After staving off the opponent's attack with two precise moves (19...♜e7! and 21...♞f7!) Black was left with all his structural trumps intact and a clear advantage in the ensuing endgame.

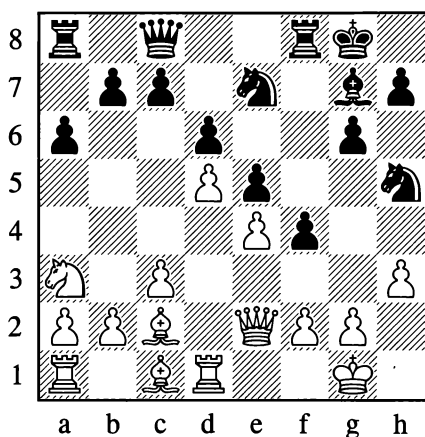
To most people, the starting position might look a little dangerous for Black, but it is just an optical illusion. An attack without a stable positional foundation is usually unsuccessful, and exchanging off the attacking pieces can be one of the most effective ways of underlining your opponent's positional defects.

Another textbook example of going for a favourable queen trade can be seen in the following game.

Magnus Carlsen – Oluwafemi Balogun

Tbilisi 2017

1.e4 d6 2.d4 g6 3.♘c4 ♖f6 4.♚e2 ♜c6
5.♜f3 ♙g7 6.0-0 ♙g4 7.c3 0-0 8.h3 ♙xf3
9.♚xf3 e5 10.♞d1 ♚e8 11.d5 ♜e7 12.♚e2
♜h5 13.♙b5 ♚c8 14.♜a3 a6 15.♙a4 f5
16.♙c2 f4



In this King's Indian pawn formation, Black intends to launch a kingside attack. However, due to the absence of Black's vital light-squared bishop, the position is in White's favour. If Black's attack on the kingside is restrained, White's counterattack on the queenside will be decisive.

17. ♚g4!

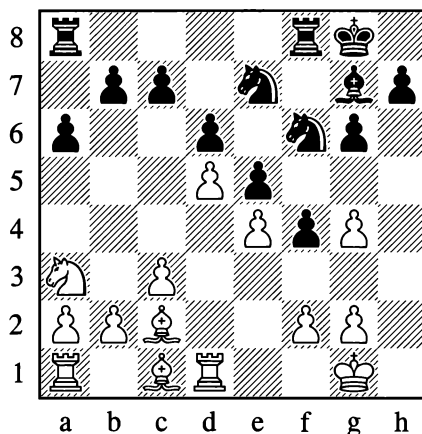
The most logical. Black's attack will be a lot weaker without the queens.

17... ♚xg4?

Black makes a wrong positional decision. The g7-bishop is bad, and due to White's subsequent attack on the queenside, his bishop pair, and the lack of counterplay, trading off the queens will lead to a one-sided endgame.

He should have kept his queen on the board with 17... ♚d8 or 17... ♚e8 and tried to prepare an attack on the kingside.

18. hxc4 ♜f6



19. g5!

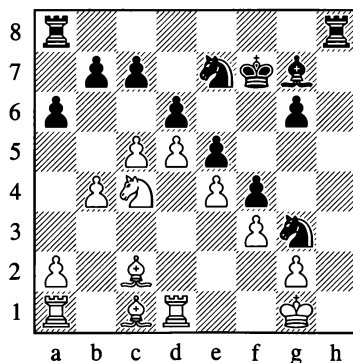
Trying to keep the structure was a lot worse:

19.f3? h5 20.gxh5 ♜xh5 21.c4 ♜g3 22.b4 ♜f7 23.c5 ♞h8

Black gains counterplay and leads the game to fascinating complications.

24. ♜c4

After 24.♜f2 ♙f6 25.♜c4 ♙h4, Black would have at least enough counterplay.



24... ♜xd5!

A spectacular combination.

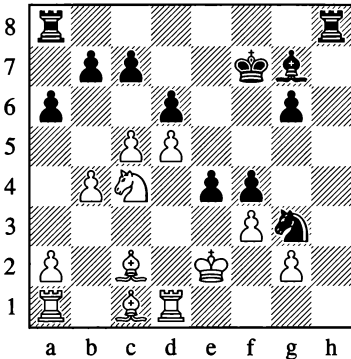
25. exd5

25.♞xd5?? would lead to checkmate in two moves: 25...♞h1† 26.♜f2 ♞f1#

25...e4 26.♔f2

26.♖b1?? is refuted by 26...♙d4! with checkmate to follow.

26...♘h1† 27.♙e2 ♘g3†



28.♙f2

After 28.♙d2? e3† 29.♙d3 ♖h5! 30.♙b3 ♙xa1 Black is winning.

28...♘h1†

With a draw by perpetual check.

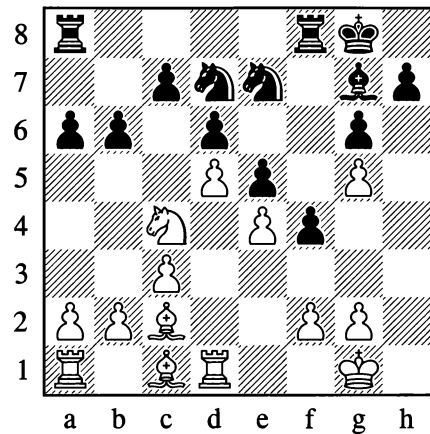
19...♘d7 20.♘c4

20.b4 is just as good: 20...h6 21.gxh6 ♙xh6 22.c4 White is better due to the mobility of his queenside pawns and the two bishops. Of course, we should not forget about Black's bad bishop.

20...b6?!

Classical wisdom instructs us to avoid pawn moves on the side that our opponent is attacking because this might lead to the creation of more weaknesses.

It would be better to go for: 20...h6 21.gxh6 ♙xh6 Planning ...♙g7 and ...♖h8.



21.b4?!

This is natural, but White had an even stronger option:

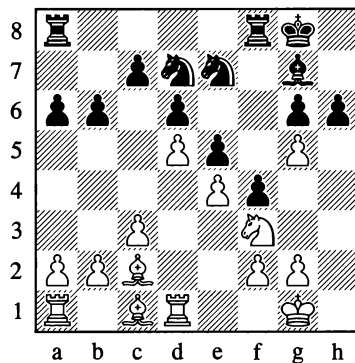
21.♘d2!

After provoking the opponent to weaken his queenside structure, White clears the way for his pawns to advance unhindered. On top of that, the knight is ready to stop the opponent's possibilities on the kingside by transferring to f3.

21...h6

What else?

22.♘f3



22...hxg5

It looks silly to invite the knight to e6, but the alternative is even worse.

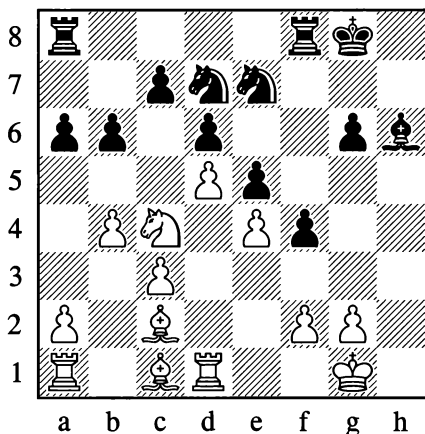
After closing the position with 22...h5, White can start pushing with 23.b4 and gain

a decisive advantage. The game is completely one-sided.

23. ♖xg5 ♙h6 24. ♖e6

White's octopus knight on e6 guarantees his advantage.

21...h6 22.gxh6 ♙xh6



23.g4!?

Carlsen really wants to suppress his opponent's counterplay.

After the simpler 23.a4 White would also have an advantage.

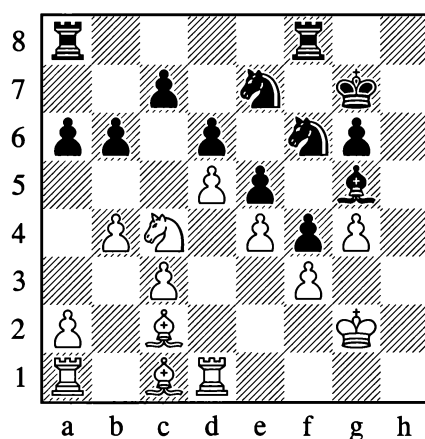
23...♖f6 24.f3

The kingside is closed and White has a slight but lasting advantage.

24...♙g5 25.♖g2

25.♖f2 would be more accurate: 25...♙h4† 26.♖e2 By transferring the king to the middle of the board, White gets ready for his operation on the queenside and keeps a significant advantage.

25...♖g7



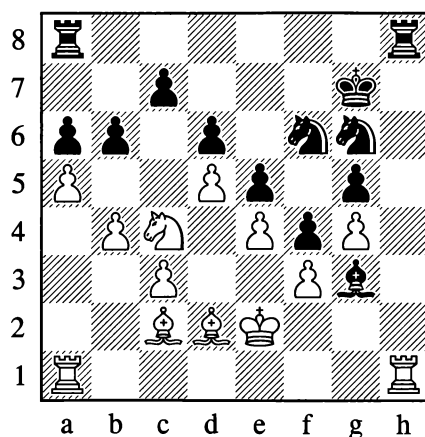
26.a4?!

26.♖h1 should have been played and, finally, White would be completely in control: 26...♖h8 27.♖xh8 ♖xh8 28.♙b2 ♙h4 29.♖h1 After neutralizing the opponent's counterplay on the open h-file, White can go about his queenside operation with ease.

26...♙h4 27.♙d2 g5 28.♖h1 ♖g6 29.♖f1 ♖h8 30.♖e2 ♙g3

During the last few moves Black has gained some chances due to his counterplay down the h-file.

31.a5



31...b5?

Black misses his chance to complicate the game.

It would have been much stronger to go for:

31...bxa5! 32.♖xa5 ♜h4!

Preparing to double rooks.

33.c4

After 33.♔d3? ♜ah8 34.♜xh4 gxf4! 35.♔xa6 h3 36.♜h1 h2 even though White has an extra pawn, the threat of ...♖h7-g5 combined with ...♖h4 gives Black a decisive advantage.

33...♜ah8 34.♜xh4 ♖xh4!?

With the threat of ...♖xf3. Black has a tonne of counterplay.

34...gxf4 is also a huge mess.

32.♖a3 ♖e7

Black tries to hold on to the queenside, but that's impossible.

32...♜h4 was the best chance, but in this version White keeps the upper hand after 33.c4! bxc4 34.♜xh4! gxf4 35.♜h1! and White's eventual passer on the queenside will be far more dangerous than Black's h-pawn. Nevertheless, the position remains complicated.

33.c4!

The time has come to open the position on the queenside.

33...c6 34.dxc6 ♖xc6 35.♔c3!

None of the opponent's pieces can be activated. Black is completely lost.

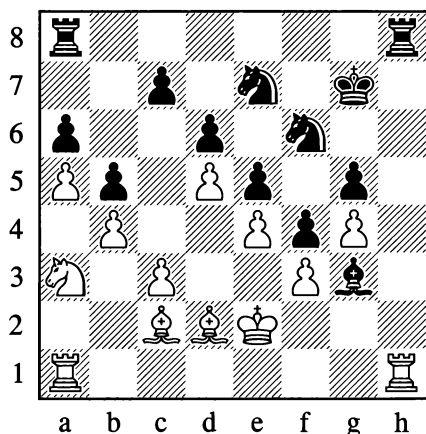
35...♜xh1 36.♜xh1 bxc4 37.♖xc4 ♜b8 38.♖xd6 ♔g6 39.♖f5

Black resigned.

1-0

There were instances where the conversion could have been cleaner, but our main point still stands. After the exchange of queens, White's space advantage and bishop pair increased in strength tremendously. Without queens, Black's attack was both slower and less threatening.

When you have the upper hand as far as long-term factors are concerned, then striving for an endgame is, in most cases, an excellent idea.



Conclusion

In this chapter, we immersed ourselves in the intricacies of the delicate relationship between exchanges and king safety.

We witnessed how exchanging a vital defender can be a crucial tool in our attacking arsenal and examined the common case of the fianchettoed g7-bishop. We saw instances when an exchange was used to facilitate an important breakthrough. We studied cases where an exchange had to be executed to win the important tempo needed to seize the initiative, and we noted three different ways of using an exchange to create long-term attacking chances against the enemy king: destroying the shelter, keeping the king in the centre, and dominating a colour complex.

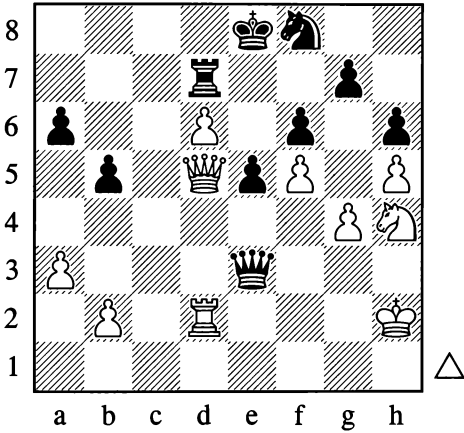
Finally, we turned to discussing how exchanges can aid a successful defensive effort. We observed how effective exchanges can be in defusing an attack, and how, when long-term factors are in favour of the defender, parrying the attack can flip the situation completely to their benefit.

Exercises

Hikaru Nakamura – Teimour Radjabov

Moscow 2019

3-1

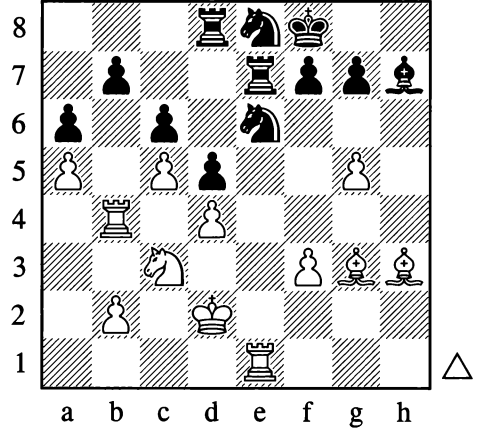


White to play

Amir Bagheri – Kivanc Haznedaroglu

Beijing (rapid) 2008

3-3

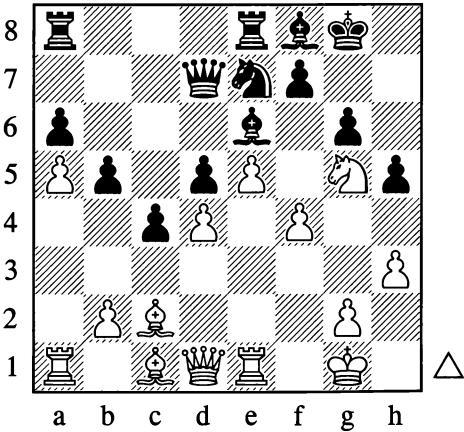


White to play

John Paul Gomez – Amir Bagheri

Dresden (Olympiad) 2008

3-2

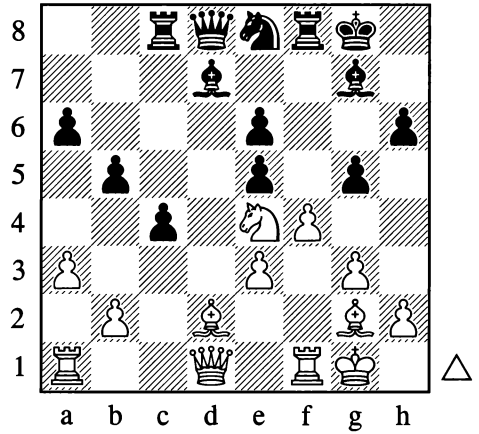


White to play

Grigoriy Oparin – Levon Aronian

Berlin 2022

3-4

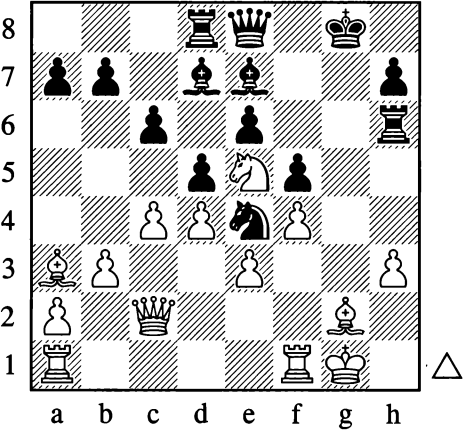


White to play

Amir Bagheri – Shirin Navabi

Teheran 2007

3-5

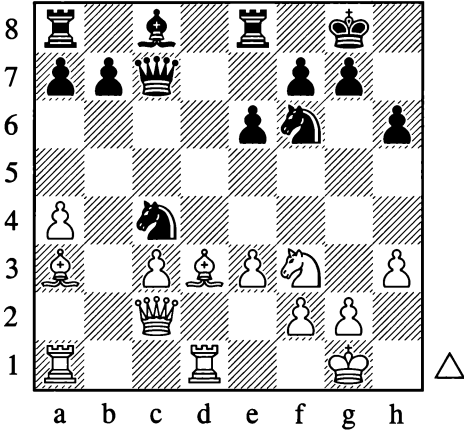


White to play

Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu – Vilka Sipila

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022

3-7

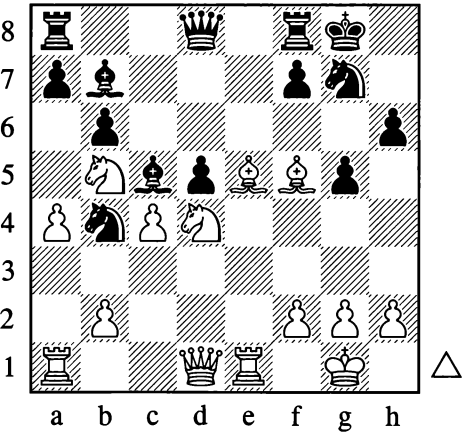


White to play

Amir Bagheri – Minh Hoang Pham

Nantes 2005

3-6

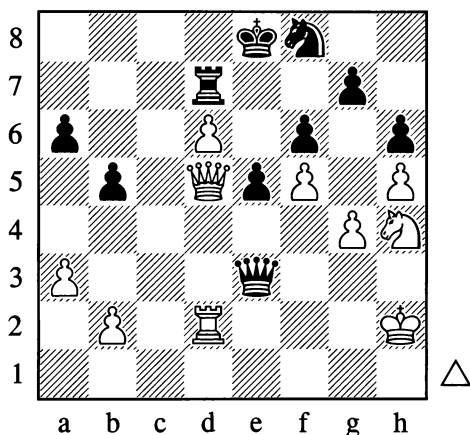


White to play

Solutions

3-1. Hikaru Nakamura – Teimour Radjabov

Moscow 2019



37. ♖g6!

White has several ways to get the full point but the text move, removing the defender of the black king, is very clear-cut.

37... ♜xg6

After 37...a5 38. ♞c2! the black queen can't give a single check and White's threats are unstoppable.

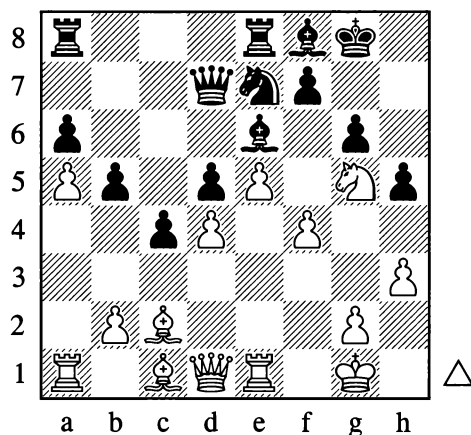
38. hxc6 ♜f4† 39. ♜h3 ♜f1† 40. ♜h4 ♜e1† 41. ♜h5

The white king found a cute way to shelter himself from checks and Black cannot defend against the incoming queen invasion. Radjabov decided to call it a day.

1-0

3-2. John Paul Gomez – Amir Bagheri

Dresden (Olympiad) 2008



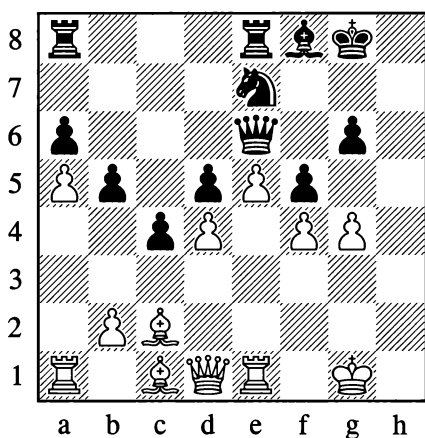
The first impression is that Black's bishop on e6 is restricted by the pawn chain and has no active prospects.

27. ♜xe6!

However, White finds out that to facilitate an attack against the opponent's king he needs to trade his beautiful knight for Black's passive bishop. That bishop was the only thing stopping White from crashing through with g2-g4 and f4-f5.

27... ♜xc6 28. g4 hxc4 29. hxc4 f5

What else? White was threatening to demolish the black shelter anyway with f4-f5.



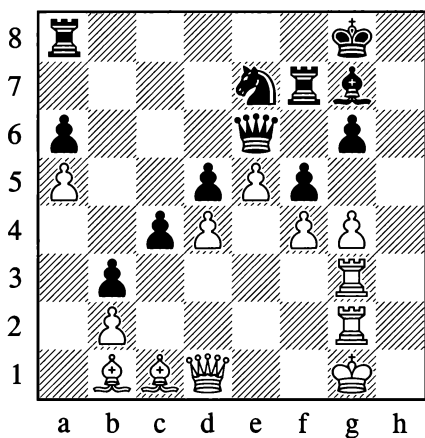
30. **Ra3!**

A powerful rook lift, bringing the worst-placed piece into the attack.

30... **g7 31. Bg3 Bf8 32. Re2**

The second rook prepares to come aboard.

32... **b4 33. Reg2 b3 34. b1 Rf7**



35. **bd2**

The bishop plans to participate in the attack as well, either with **b4** or with **e1-h4**.

35... **Bb8 36. gxf5 gxf5 37. Wh5**

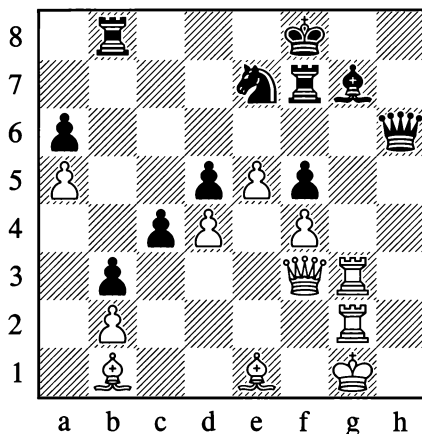
White's attack is irresistible.

37... **cf8 38. e1?!**

Giving Black a chance to play on.

White could play **38. Rh3!** preventing ...**Wh6**, and after **38...Bb5 39. e1** he is completely winning.

38... **Wh6 39. Wf3**

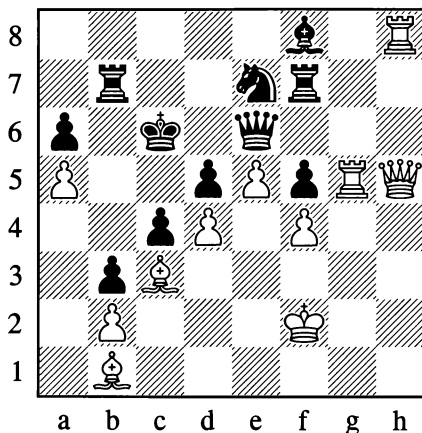


Of course, White refrains from the exchange of queens as that would seriously hinder his attacking potential.

39... **Bb5 40. Bg5 c8 41. e3?!**

41. Rh5 was again winning by force: **41...We6 42. Rh7 Qg6 43. Bg5 Bbb7 44. Wg3** White wins a piece.

41...e8 42. Rh2 We6 43. Rh8 cd7 44. Wh5 Bb7 45. cf2 cc6

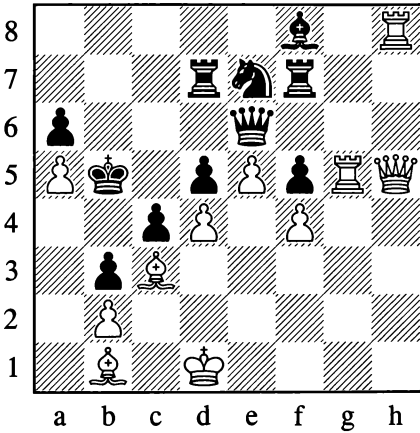


46.♙e1?!

46.♙xf5! was another killer blow: 46...♞xf5 (46...♜xf5 47.♞g6 drops the queen) 47.♞xf5 ♜xf5 48.♞xf5 ♜xf5 49.♞xf8 ♜g7 50.f5 White's pawns decide.

46...♙b5 47.♙d1 ♞d7?!

Not the most tenacious.



48.♞h7!

White finally crashes through.

48...♞xh7 49.♞xh7

The f5-pawn falls and the game is over.

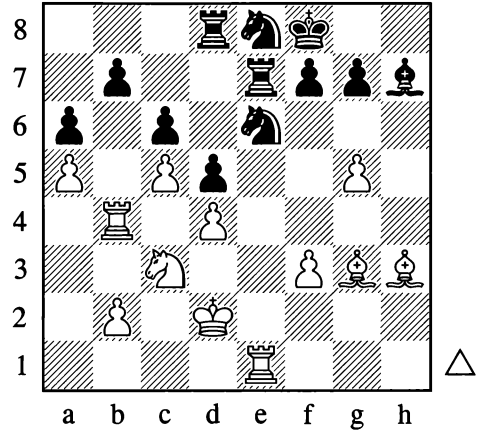
49...♞h6 50.♙xf5 ♞xh7 51.♙xh7 ♜c6 52.♙f5 ♞f7 53.e6 ♞g7 54.♙xg7 ♙xg7 55.♙g6

Black resigned.

1–0

3-3. Amir Bagheri – Kivanc Haznedaroglu

Beijing (rapid) 2008



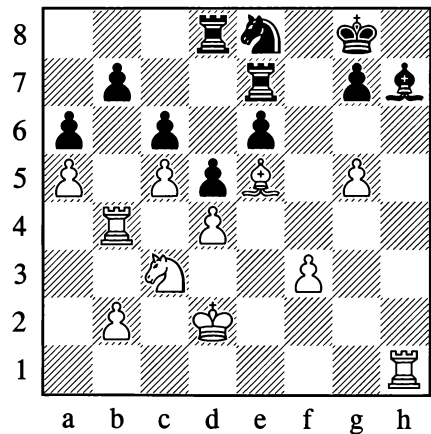
28.♙xe6!

Removing the vital defender of the opponent's king.

28...fxe6

After 28...♞xe6 29.♞xe6 fxe6 30.♞xb7 White is totally winning.

29.♞h1 ♙g8 30.♙e5



The white pieces are dominating.

30...♖f7 31.f4

It would have been better for White to keep the f4-square available for his knight:

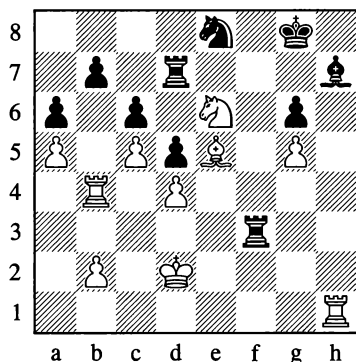
31.♖e2! ♜dd7 32.♖f4 g6

What a sad necessity.

33.♖xe6

Certainly not the only way, but White has a cute finishing touch in mind.

33...♜xf3



34.♖d8!

An elegant blow.

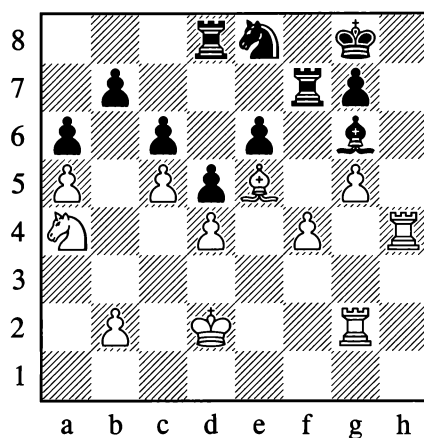
34...♜xd8 35.♜xb7

White wins.

31...♜dd7 32.♜b3

White intends to transfer his rook from the queenside to the h-file.

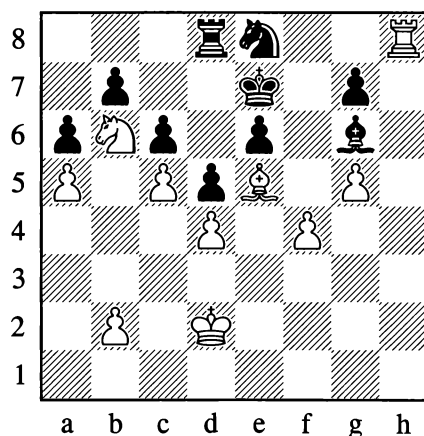
32...♙f5 33.♖a4 ♜d8 34.♜h4 ♜c8 35.♜g3 ♜d8 36.♜g2 ♙g6



37.♜gh2

Finally, the white rooks are doubled on the open h-file. White infiltrates the black camp with a devastating effect.

37...♙f8 38.♜h8† ♙e7 39.♖b6 ♜f8 40.♜xf8 ♙xf8 41.♜h8† ♙e7



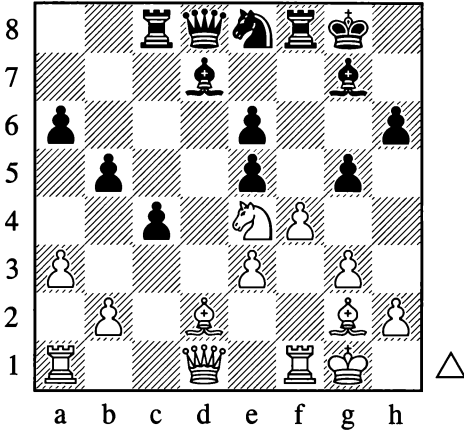
42.♙d6†!

The final touch. As in most cases, the gradual increase of our positional advantage culminates in a nice tactical finish.

42...♖xd6 43.cxd6† ♜xd6 44.♖c8† ♙d7 45.♖xd6 ♙xd6 46.♜g8
1-0

3-4. Grigoriy Oparin – Levon Aronian

Berlin 2022



20. ♕a5!

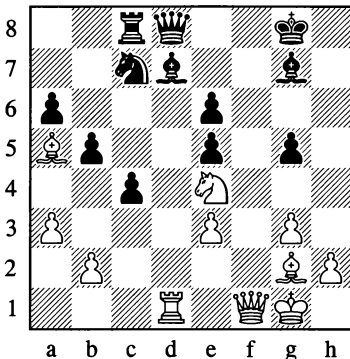
Oparin aims to exchange his passive d2-bishop with its counterpart on d7. The deflection of the black queen to a5 combined with the presence of opposite-coloured bishops will give White a decisive attack.

20. fxc5? would be misguided: 20... ♖xf1† 21. ♖xf1 ♕c6! 22. gxh6 ♕xh6 Black gains some chances to defend.

20... ♖xa5

The alternative was:

20... ♖c7 21. fxc5 ♖xf1† 22. ♖xf1 hxc5 23. ♖d1
The black position is under tremendous pressure. He can hardly move!



23... ♖e7

After 23... ♖e8 24. ♖f6† ♕xf6 25. ♖xf6 Black's vulnerable king and passive pieces give him no chances to defend against the incoming massacre on the kingside.

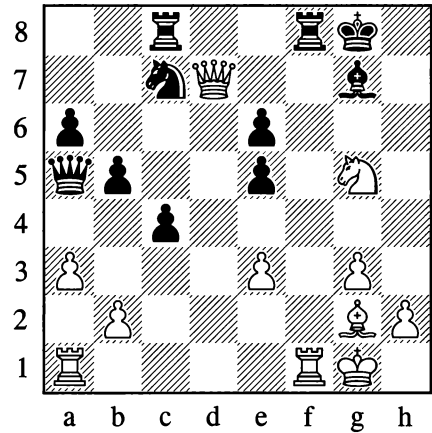
24. ♕b4 ♖d8 25. ♖d6

Black's position is already resignable.

21. ♖xd7 ♖c7 22. fxc5

With most of Black's forces diverted to the queenside, there is no chance of survival against a kingside attack.

22... hxc5 23. ♖xc5



The game is over.

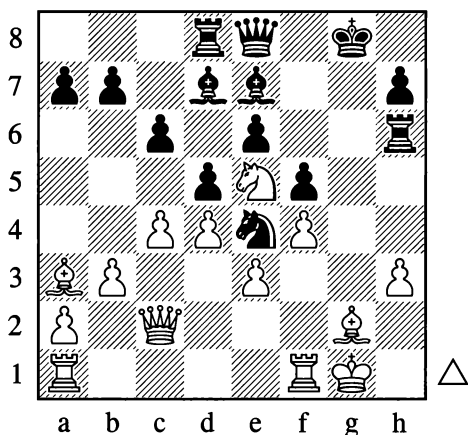
23... ♖b6 24. h4 ♖cd8 25. ♖xf8† ♖xf8
26. ♖h2 e4 27. ♖d1 ♖h8 28. ♖d6 ♖b8
29. ♖c6 ♖e8 30. ♖xe6 ♖g8 31. ♖g5

Black resigned. He is defenceless against White's various mating threats.

1-0

3-5. Amir Bagheri – Shirin Navabi

Teheran 2007

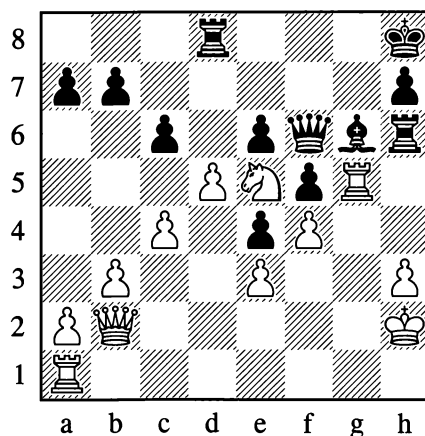


White eliminates both of his opponent's active minor pieces with two consecutive exchanges.

22. ♕xe7 ♖xe7 23. ♕xe4! dxe4 24. ♔h2

The comparison between the powerful white knight and the useless black bishop once again showcases the importance of correct exchanges. White is completely winning.

24... ♖e8 25. ♖g1† ♕g6 26. ♖g5 ♔h8 27. ♗b2! ♗f6 28. d5



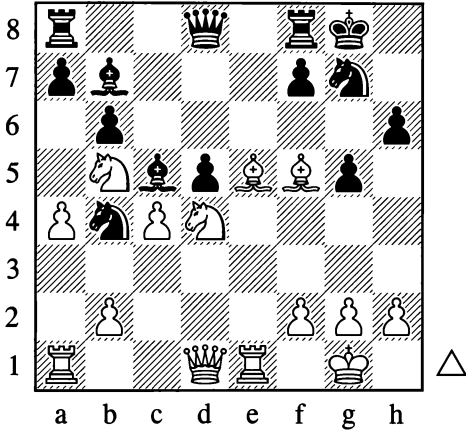
Black probably thought he was losing material immediately and resigned.

Even though that was not the case, his position would indeed be losing after: 28...exd5 29. ♖d1 ♔g7 30. ♗d4 White's pieces are much more active than their counterparts and it is simply impossible for Black to defend.

1-0

3-6. Amir Bagheri – Minh Hoang Pham

Nantes 2005



22. ♖xg7!

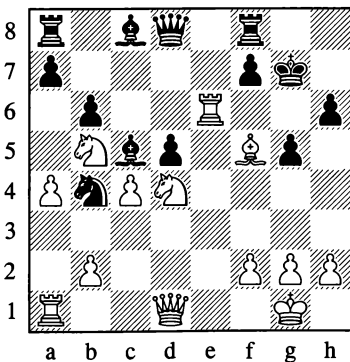
White correctly gives up his powerful bishop to remove the main defender of the black king.

22... ♖xg7 23. ♖e6!

Preparing the unstoppable threat of ♖h5.

23... fxe6

23... ♖c8 does not help either:



24. ♖h5! A killer blow. After 24... ♖h8 (24... ♖xe6 allows a forced checkmate: 25. ♖xe6† fxe6 26. ♖g6† ♖h8 27. ♖h7#) 25. ♖ae1! White ignores the threat to his rook and brings all his reserve forces into play. Black is busted.

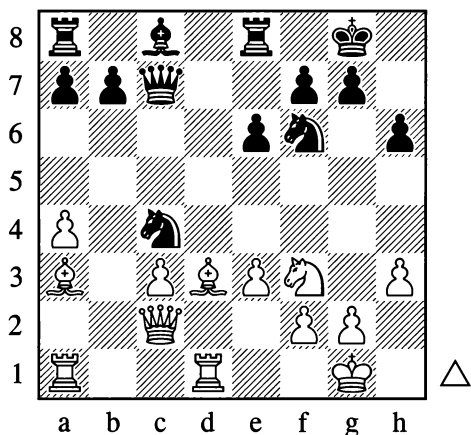
24. ♖xe6† ♖h8 25. ♖xd8 ♖axd8 26. ♖h5

White is completely winning, and he eventually converted his advantage into a full point.

...1-0

3-7. Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu – Vilka Sipila

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022



White has a lead in development but Black has a structural advantage, and if he manages to bring his queenside bishop into the game he will be completely fine.

18. ♕xc4!

Here we witness the skilful transformation of a long-term advantage (bishop pair) into a short-term one (initiative).

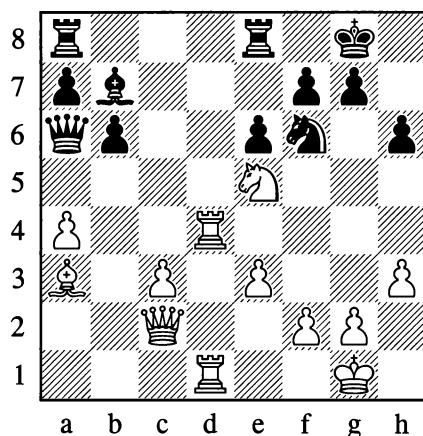
18... ♖xc4 19. ♘d4 ♗a6 20. ♘e5 b6 21. ♖ad1

White has parted with his two bishops but in exchange he gained some very big tempos against the enemy queen, giving him a tremendous boost in the activity of his pieces.

21... ♕b7?

Rendering this move impossible was one of the main points of White's operation, but Black fails to notice it loses by force.

Correct would have been 21... ♖a5 22. ♕d6 ♕b7 23. ♖f4 but White retains a huge initiative anyway.



22. ♘xf7!

White takes advantage of the lack of sufficient defensive forces around the opponent's king and lands a devastating tactical blow. The game is over.

22... ♔xf7 23. ♖d7+ ♘xd7 24. ♖xd7+ ♔f6 25. ♖h7 ♖g8 26. ♕e7+ ♔f7 27. ♕h4+ ♔f8 28. ♖g6 ♖xa4 29. ♕e7#

1-0

Chapter 4

Exchanges and Lasting Advantages

Advantages in our game can be classified into two categories: short-term and long-term. For example, a lead in development is a short-term advantage, which we can imagine is made of ice. If it is not used immediately, it will melt and disappear. On the contrary, long-term advantages are made of stone, and will not disappear over time. Long-term advantages include material, pawn structure, space, controlling open files and many more. We have already discussed in detail the relationship between space and exchanging pieces in Chapter 2. In this one, we will focus on other long-term factors.

We have dedicated most of this chapter to the games of Magnus Carlsen. His ability to convert a long-term advantage to a full point is widely recognized as the best of any player to ever play the game, and his mastery of knowing which pieces to keep on the board has played an essential role in the building of this reputation.

When Style Matters & Keeping the Tension

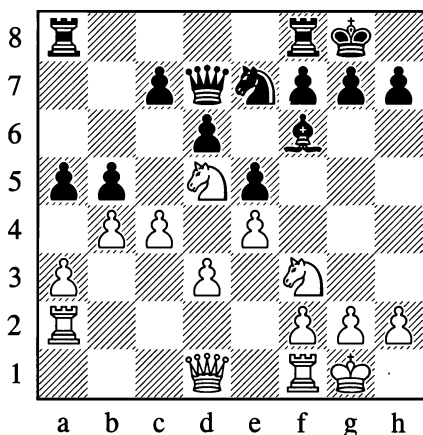
Making the right decision becomes harder when there is more than one good plan available. That is especially the case when we have a choice between a dynamic plan and a positional one. If the objective merits of both plans are roughly equivalent, that's when the style of the player might come into play.

In the following game, we will notice how playing style can affect these situations and start a small discussion about the importance of keeping the tension.

Magnus Carlsen – Ding Liren

St. Louis (rapid) 2017

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.0-0 ♙e7 6.d3 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.a3 0-0 9.♘c3
♘a5 10.♙a2 ♙e6 11.b4 ♙xa2 12.♙xa2 ♘c6
13.♙g5 ♖d7 14.♙xf6 ♙xf6 15.♘d5 a5 16.c4
♘e7



17.♙c2!?

Keeping the tension! This instructive half-waiting move is deeply rooted in Carlsen's style.

In such a situation, the white player could be uncertain of whether he should damage the opponent's structure with ♘xf6 or stick to a plan of his own, and leave that bishop be. Since the bishop is passively placed, Carlsen does not want to exchange it. What he really wants is to tempt his opponent just enough to convince him to exchange the knights on d5 and reach a position where he has a good knight against the opponent's bad bishop. Again, the motto "what remains" is important here.

In the meantime, by putting his rook on the c-file White is calmly preparing for the file to open somewhere down the line.

After 17.♘xf6† gxf6 18.♙c2 White would also have a tiny advantage, but Carlsen's choice seems practically stronger from a human perspective. In this case, Black's king is not really in danger as White can't bring any pieces to the attack, and if White doesn't prove his advantage quickly, Black will eventually play ...f6-f5 and repair his structure. It seems like the advantage lost its permanent nature and it's a matter of time before Black completely equalizes.

17...♘xd5

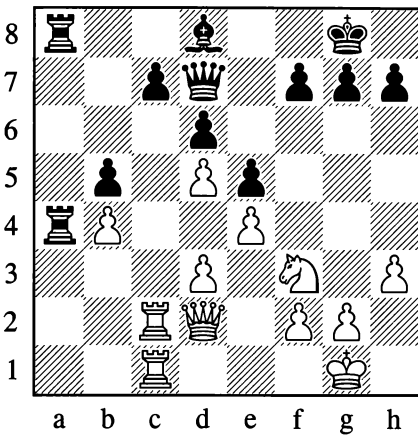
Ding reluctantly acquiesces to the exchange on d5.

The text move is objectively fine but going for 17...bxc4 18.♘xf6† gxf6 19.♙xc4 axb4 20.axb4 was probably a better practical choice. White retains an edge due to Black's kingside weaknesses and the pressure down the semi-open c-file. Nevertheless, it seems like Black's moves will be a lot easier compared to the game continuation. The crucial difference is that in this line Black doesn't have any passive pieces. In the game, he gets stuck with a terrible bishop.

18.cxd5

The c7-pawn has become backward and the square in front of it can be used by White as an excellent outpost. Black's bishop is clearly inferior compared to the white knight.

18...axb4 19.axb4 ♙a4 20.♖d2 ♙fa8 21.♙fc1
♘d8 22.h3



22...♖a1?!

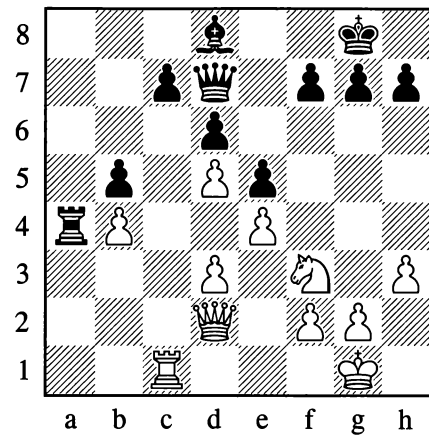
Black should have kept all rooks on the board and played a waiting move like 22...h6, preparing ...f7-f5 with some counterplay. Calm “quiet” moves like that are hard to play in fast time controls.

After trading a pair of rooks or all of them, White’s advantage gets stronger. The black bishop was “bad” according to classical guidelines due to the pawn structure. However, it kept both white rooks at bay by defending the c7-pawn. Not too shabby for a “bad” bishop. Black’s rooks on the a-file were perfectly placed to always threaten irritating counterplay.

With the rooks gone, Black’s potential counterplay disappears and he loses his main trump in the position: his more active rooks.

23.♖xa1 ♖xa1† 24.♖c1 ♖a4

After 24...♖xc1† 25.♖xc1 White can claim a small but lasting advantage.



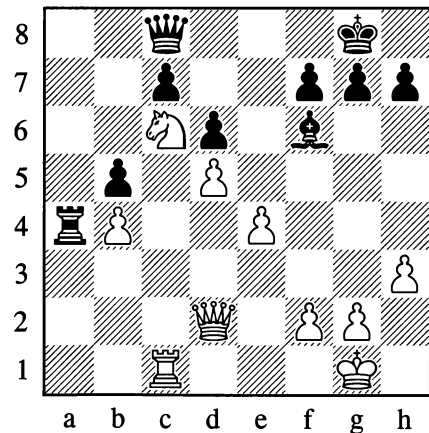
25.d4! exd4 26.♘xd4 ♙f6 27.♘c6

The white knight occupies a dream position. The weak b5-pawn and the c6-outpost ensure a pleasant advantage.

27...♖c8?

Allowing White to finish the game quickly.

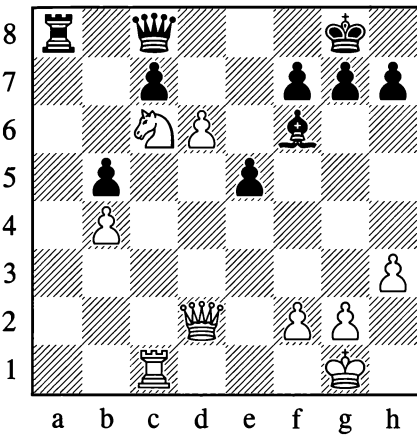
The lesser evil was 27...♖e8 28.♖e2 g6 29.♖xb5 but White remains a healthy pawn up anyway.



28.e5!

A powerful breakthrough.

28...dxe5 29.d6! ♖a8



30. ♖e7†!

White gets a powerful passed pawn on e7 that will decide the game shortly.

30... ♗xe7 31. dxe7 g6 32. ♖d5 h6

Ding resigned without waiting for Carlsen to make his move.

White had several ways to finish the game. The simplest was 33. ♗xc7 ♖e8 34. ♖xe5 and Black is completely helpless.

1–0

Objectively speaking, it's not clear whether 17. ♗c2!? was any better compared to 17. ♖xf6†. Nevertheless, Carlsen's choice to keep the tension presented his formidable opponent with much tougher problems to solve.

Keeping the tension like this is counterintuitive for most people. The majority of humans dislike "uncertainty" and that translates to chess by always aiming for clarity and resolving the tension. However, the game of chess is objective and does not care about our species' psychological defects. This in turn means we should always try to tone down our emotions and try to be as objective as possible.

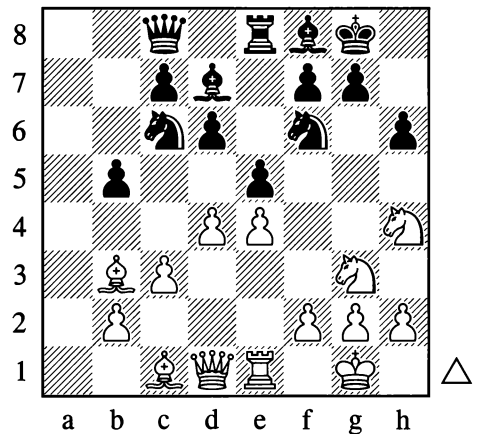
To play better moves, we should embrace uncertainty and tension. After all, chess is so complicated we can very seldomly play moves that are much more than an educated guess, and that's not a bad thing. On the contrary, it amounts to a large part of the reasons why this game is so fascinating. If you're still having trouble keeping the tension, remember: your opponents probably feel as uneasy as you do around uncertainty. They're not machines, and the only certain thing is they're going to make mistakes.

The Bishop Pair

Having the bishop pair is one of the most common long-term advantages and can single-handedly play a decisive role in the outcome of the game.

Magnus Carlsen – Veselin Topalov

Nanjing 2010



18. ♖g6!

At first glance, it seems unreasonable to exchange a knight that was able to jump to f5 for the bad black bishop on f8 that is surrounded by its own pawns. However, there are more important factors at play and, as we have mentioned plenty of times already, only what remains on the board is important.

In addition to obtaining the two-bishop advantage, Carlsen pays attention to the opponent's king position which is somewhat weakened by ...h7-h6 and could be attacked in the future. The bishop on f8 is the main defender of the black king and the difference in safety will be clearly felt when it is removed.

18...♖a5 19.♖xf8 ♜xf8 20.♙c2

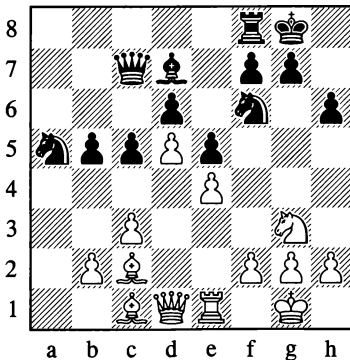
White has the bishop pair and his next step should be to open the position.

Strategy in chess is like a chain consisting of loops. These loops can be tactical or strategic in nature. The loops are independent but securely bonded together as one. After completing each loop, the next one begins and, ultimately, an overall strategy is created.

20...♜e8?!

Topalov should have reacted in the centre:

20...c5 21.d5 ♖c7



22.b3

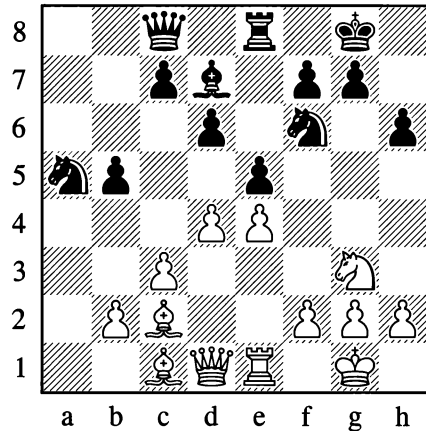
In the event of the immediate 22.f4 ♖c4 23.b3 Black can hold his own with a crucial in-between move: 23...exf4! 24.♙xf4 ♖e5 The strong e5-knight gives Black a good position.

22...♖b7 23.h3 ♜a8 24.♙e3

After 24.f4 ♜a1 Black finds some chances to create his own counterplay.

24...♖e8 25.f4 f6

White is certainly better, but Black can rely on his counterplay on the queenside to give him decent chances to hold.



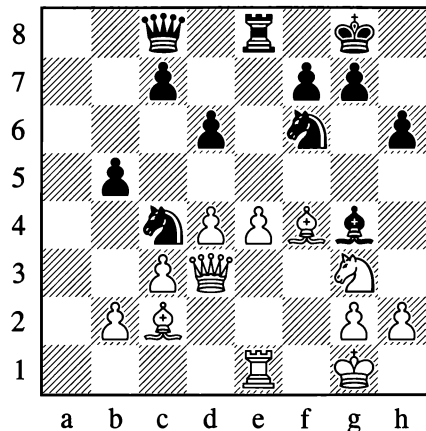
21.f4!

The second loop begins: White creates tension in the centre, looking to open the position.

21...♙g4 22.♖d3 exf4?

After this mistake, Black's position is probably lost. He should have tried to maintain the tension in the centre, although his position was unpleasant anyway.

23.♙xf4 ♖c4



24.♔c1!

There is no shame in the return of the bishop. On the contrary, it's perfectly placed on its initial square, both participating in the attack and protecting the b2-pawn.

24...c5 25.♖f1

The last loop begins: a search for the final blows.

25...cxd4 26.cxd4 ♔d8 27.h3 ♔e6 28.b3

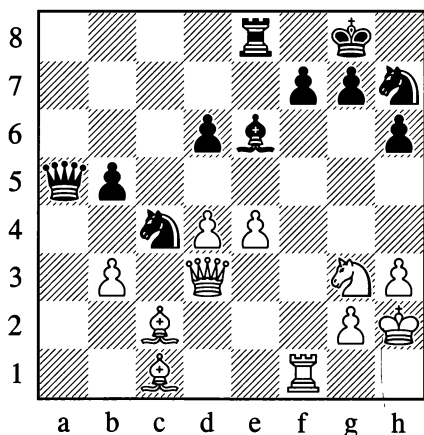
Carlsen slowly pushes the black pieces backwards while improving his own position.

28...♖a5

28...♖b6 29.♖xb5 is hopeless.

29.♔h2

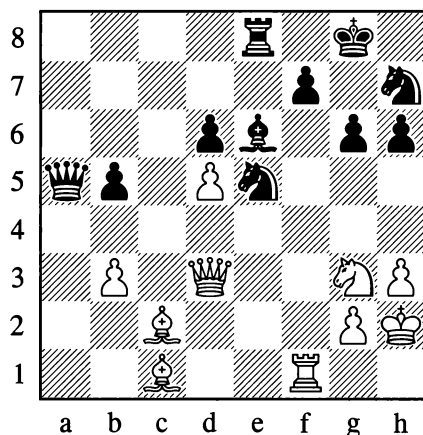
He even finds time to improve his king. He is in no rush! His attack will not go away as it is based on the pair of bishops and the pawn structure, and both these advantages are permanent.

29...♖h7**30.e5**

After all of White's pieces were put to their optimal attacking posts, it's time for the position to explode.

30...g6 31.d5!

The situation is ripe for such operations. The disparity in activity almost guarantees that the tactics will work out for White.

31...♖xe5**32.dxe6!**

A beautiful finishing touch. Topalov did not see any point in continuing the game and resigned on the spot.

After 32...♖xd3 33.exf7† ♔f8 34.♔xh6† ♔e7 35.fxe8=♖† ♔xe8 36.♔xd3 White has a tonne of material for the queen and Black is completely helpless against White's threats.

1-0

As we saw, giving up the h4-knight for the f8-bishop was a great call. At first, it might have looked like the f8-bishop was passive but, once again, what remained on the board was important. The pair of bishops almost single-handedly decided the game.

Giving up the Bishop Pair

Everyone knows that having the pair of bishops is, in most cases, an advantage. At the same time, one of the greatest strengths attributed to the bishop pair is the ability to exchange one or both bishops for enemy knights. That

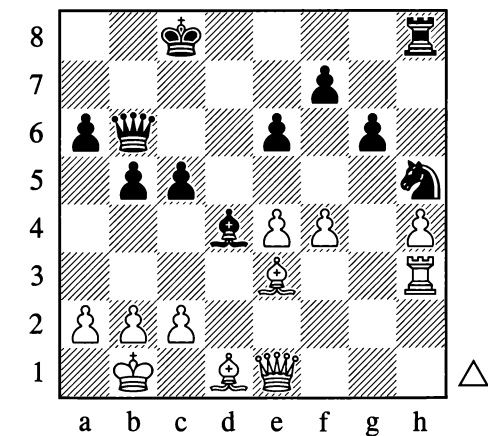
paradoxical statement will be at the core of this segment.

We briefly touched on this subject in Chapter 2, when analysing the game Giannoulakis – Donchenko. That game nicely showcased how tough it would be for a knight to hunt down and capture a bishop. The fact that bishops often find it much easier to hunt down and capture knights is a significant advantage. Imagine negotiating a deal, which your adversary is always obliged to accept. Even if you don't want the deal right now, who knows about next year? That's how having the bishop pair usually works. It's a great negotiating chip that should, in most cases, be cashed out eventually for the full point. Still, letting go of a permanent advantage as strong as the bishop pair isn't easy, and players often miss the right moment to transform the advantage.

Let us see a game from the youngest French player to ever become a grandmaster, that nicely illustrates the power of a well-timed exchange of a bishop for a knight.

Marc Andria Maurizzi – Vitaly Sivuk

Reykjavik 2021



22.♙c1!

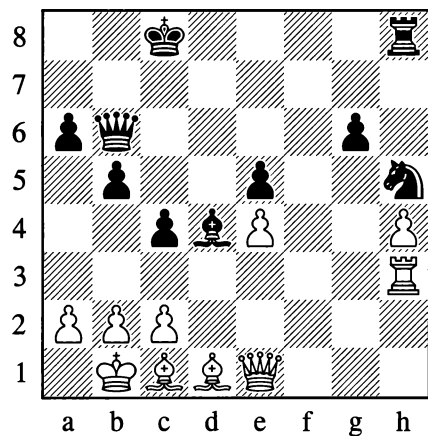
At first, Maurizzi avoids exchanging bishops and maintains his bishop pair.

The engine claims 22...♙xd4 is also interesting but it looks very committal. The proposed line continues: 22...cxd4 23.♞f3 ♖b8 24.f5 e5 25.♞b3 White keeps some advantage thanks to the idea of a2-a4. However, in the game his position was much easier to handle.

22...c4 23.f5!

A logical move. White is trying to open the position for his bishops and gain access to the opponent's king.

23...e5 24.fxg6 fxg6



25.♙xh5!

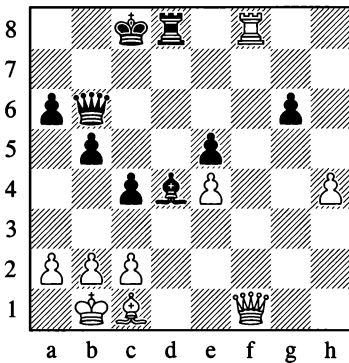
The right moment to surrender one of White's bishops. Maurizzi gives up his bishop-pair advantage to prevent the opponent's knight from coming to the excellent outpost on f4. If that happened, after the possible exchange on f4 the opposite-coloured-bishops position would have provided Black with good chances to keep the balance.

25...gxh5

25...♞xh5

This could be met with:

26.♞f1 ♞h7 27.♞f3 ♞d7 28.♞f6 ♞d6 29.♞f8+ ♞d8



Even though White has infiltrated the black camp with his rook, Black is holding his own for the moment, claiming that there is no easy progress to be made.

30. ♖g5!

Black's defensive construction was precarious and collapses completely.

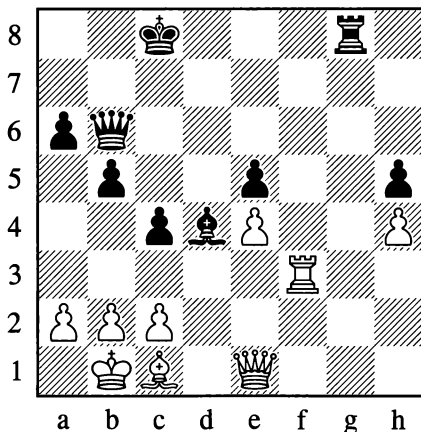
30... ♜xf8 31. ♜xf8+ ♖b7 32. ♜f7+ ♖a8 33. ♙f6

The g6-pawn falls and even though there are some tricks left up Black's sleeve, White is objectively and practically winning. The extremely vulnerable black king will always guarantee easy play for White.

26. ♜f3

The difference between the activity of the rooks and the safety of the kings is what will ultimately prove decisive.

26... ♜g8



27. ♙g5!

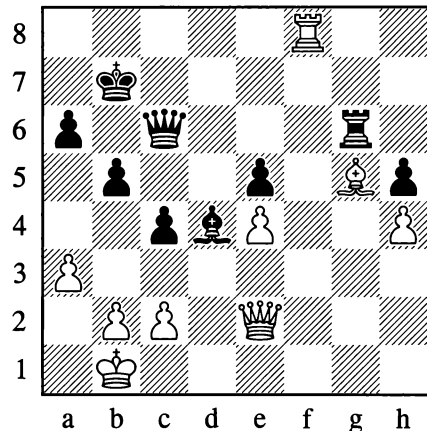
White blocks the g-file from the opponent's rook and prepares to initiate his attack against the opponent's exposed king through the open f-file. The game is completely one-sided.

27... ♜c6 28. a3 ♜g6

It's hard to suggest something constructive for Black.

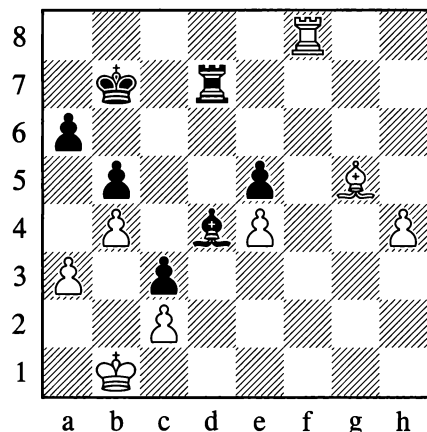
For example, after 28... ♖b8 29. c3 ♙c5 30. ♜e2 a5 31. ♜f6 ♜d7 32. ♜f5 ♜e8 33. ♙f6 White wins at least one pawn.

29. ♜f8+ ♖b7 30. ♜e2



The h5-pawn drops.

30... ♜d6 31. ♜xh5 c3 32. ♜f7+ ♜d7 33. ♜xd7+ ♜xd7 34. b4



White's position is totally winning. He has an extra pawn and his bishop is much better than its counterpart. The continuation of the game does not need much explanation. Black has no counterplay, so the game is effectively over already.

34...♖h7 35.♖f6 ♜b6 36.♞e6 ♞h8 37.♞xe5 ♜f2 38.♞e7† ♜c8 39.♞e6 ♜b7 40.♞h6 ♞e8 41.♖f6 ♜d4 42.♖f4 ♜e5 43.♖f7† ♜c6 44.♞e7 ♞xe7 45.♞xe7 ♜d7 46.♜g5 ♜e6 47.h5

Black resigned.

1–0

As we saw, White first refused an exchange of bishops, continuing to hold on to his bishop pair as a bargaining chip that prevented Black from opening the centre. After Black agreed to close the centre with 23...e5 the young Frenchman realized he could transform his advantage into a larger one. From having the two bishops, he went to having control over the “only” open file. Of course, it wasn't technically the only open file, as the d- and g-files were “open” as well, but they were both clogged by the d4- and g5-bishops respectively.

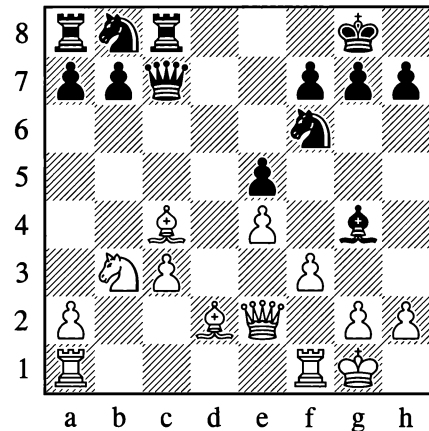
Controlling the only open file when infiltration squares are available is, in most cases, an advantage much larger than the pair of bishops – and one that is almost always enough to deliver the full point. When pondering whether to give up one of your bishops, the question you must ponder is: “Is what I'm getting in exchange better or worse compared to the advantage I had before?”

Another significant change that could justify the decision to part with our pair of bishops can be a dramatic change in pawn structure.

Magnus Carlsen – Levon Aronian

Karlsruhe 2019

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.e4 ♜b4 6.♜g5 c5 7.♞xc4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♞xc3† 9.bxc3 ♞a5 10.♜d2 0–0 11.♞e2 e5 12.♘b3 ♞c7 13.0–0 ♜g4 14.f3 ♞c8



White must decide if and under what circumstances he should exchange his c4-bishop.

15.♜d5!

The only move to fight for an advantage. Carlsen decides to give up his bishop pair to create a powerful passed pawn on d5 which can be defended by c3-c4. This change in the pawn structure will also weaken the black pawn on e5, as White will be able to attack it down the e-file. There was no good way of keeping the bishop.

After 15.♜d3 ♜e6 Black is completely fine, as White kept a useless piece on d3 and, in exchange, Black got to keep the beautifully active e6-bishop.

In the event of 15.♞xf7† ♞xf7 16.fxg4 White achieves nothing because of 16...♞c4! and Black has a tonne of counterplay.

Black is stuck in a dilemma. If he takes on d5, then White obtains a strong, protected passed pawn. Otherwise, White will enjoy a great space advantage with the pair of bishops for free.

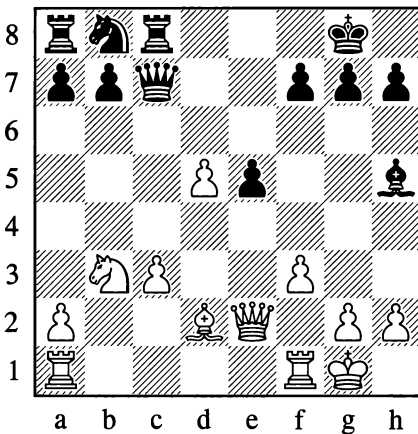
15...♖xd5

The lesser evil. Black needs to unbalance the game and seek his chances in a double-edged position.

If he tries to be solid with 15...♙e6, then White can play 16.c4! ♖c6 17.♙e3 and keep a significant advantage because of his space superiority. Black is relegated to complete passivity.

16.exd5 ♙h5

16...♙f5 does not change a great deal: 17.♙ac1 ♖d7 18.c4 The position is similar to the game, but White's f-pawn is not pinned so an eventual f3-f4 is very much on the cards.



17.c4!

White starts initiating play on the queenside where, on top of his spatial superiority, he has more pieces influencing the situation. Note how offside the h5-bishop starts to look already.

17...♖d7

The pawn wasn't hanging. After 17...♙xc4?? 18.♙fc1 White wins.

18.♙fc1!

Carlsen prepares to push his a- and c-pawns.

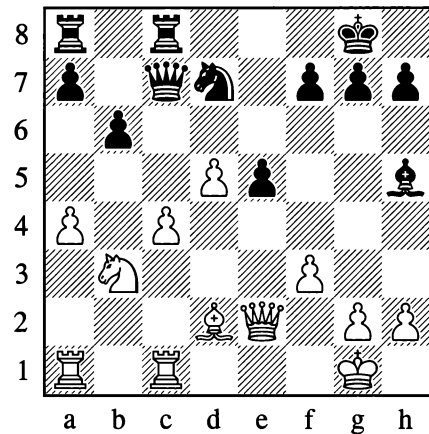
18.♙ac1!? with the idea of ♙fd1 is also interesting.

18...b6

Black prevents c4-c5. Nevertheless, this move creates some new weaknesses on the queenside.

19.a4

White focuses on a queenside attack. The reason he chose 18.♙fc1! over 18.♙ac1 becomes clear.



19...a5?!

Weakening the b6-pawn.

This is actually a typical and logical move in most similar situations. Black doesn't want to let White continue his minority attack with a4-a5 and axb6, as then White would exchange his isolated a4-pawn with Black's perfectly placed pawn on a7. By fixing the structure with ...a7-a5 Black accepts to weaken his b6-pawn but, in exchange, White is going to keep a weak pawn on a4 as well.

However, there's a catch: with the bishop so awkwardly placed on h5 the weakness of the a4-pawn is never going to be felt.

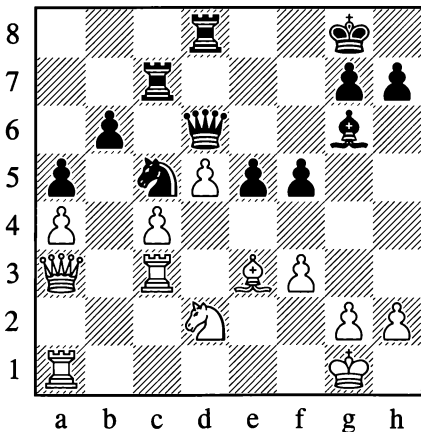
19...♔d6 would have been better, trying to be as solid as possible. After 20.♙e1 (20.a5? b5! gives Black good counterplay) 20...♙g6 White has only a slight advantage.

20.♖f2 ♔d6 21.♙e3 ♙g6 22.♔d2 f6 23.♖b2 ♖c7 24.♜d2 ♜c5 25.♖a3 ♔d8 26.♖c3

White has a pleasant long-term advantage so there is no need to rush. Carlsen has been slowly but surely improving the placement of his pieces while at the same time poking and prodding Black wherever he can.

26...f5?

Aronian finally loses his patience and decides to play “actively”. Nevertheless, this move severely weakens the e5-pawn.



27.♙e1!

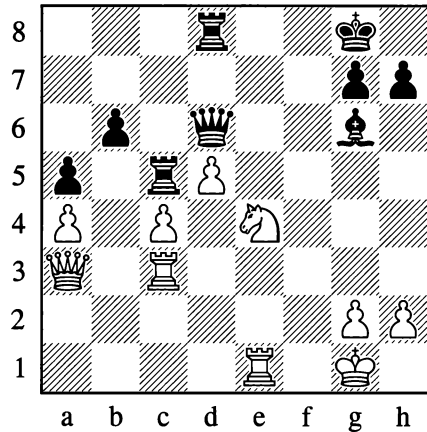
Carlsen targets the new-found weakness on e5 and the black position starts to crumble.

27...e4

Trying to repurpose the bishop also doesn't help: 27...♙e8 28.♙xc5 ♖xc5 29.♖ce3 ♙d7 30.♖a1! (Not 30.♖xe5? due to 30...♙xd5! and

Black is suddenly better.) 30...♖e8 31.♖xe5 ♖xe5 32.♖xe5 White wins a pawn.

28.fxe4 fxe4 29.♙xc5 ♖xc5 30.♜xe4



White is a pawn up for no compensation. Carlsen has no trouble putting the game away in his usual clinical manner.

30...♖e5 31.♖ce3 ♖cc8 32.h3 ♖c7 33.♜d2 ♖e8 34.♖e7 ♖xe7 35.♖xe7 ♖d8 36.♖e3 ♖c7 37.♖e6 ♖c5 38.♖b3

After the b6-pawn falls Black has no chance to save the game. Aronian decided it was time to resign.

1–0

A magnificent positional game. This time, Carlsen used his “bargaining chip” of the bishop pair to force Black into taking the bishop on d5 and transform the structure in a way that gave him a permanent positional advantage. Especially when you compare the game move (15.♙d5!) with the alternative White had of keeping the bishop pair (15.♙d3), it becomes apparent that it would be silly to keep a bishop that would be so much worse compared to its counterpart.

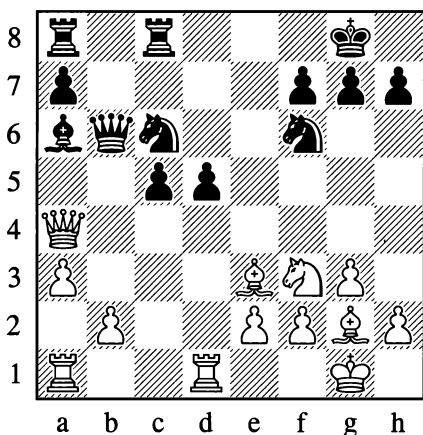
In the next game, Carlsen once again parts with his bishop pair to change the structure

but, this time, there is a much greater tactical element to his operation. The main driving factor of his decision is his desire to retain the initiative!

Magnus Carlsen – Pentala Harikrishna

Stavanger 2016

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♙a6
5.♘bd2 ♙b4 6.♚a4 c5 7.a3 ♙xd2† 8.♙xd2
0-0 9.dxc5 bxc5 10.♙g2 ♚b6 11.0-0 ♘c6
12.♙e3 ♜fc8 13.♜fd1 d5 14.cxd5 exd5



15.♙xc5!

It didn't make sense to keep a bishop that, if given the chance, Black would start to push around with ...d5-d4. In complicated middlegame positions like this one, dynamics should always be factored in. Chess is never only about long-term considerations. If not properly dealt with, tactics and piece activity can overshadow most long-term advantages.

In fact, the text move does not win a pawn. Its main purpose is to trade off White's e2-pawn for Black's c5-pawn. That will leave Black with a weak pawn in the centre while White will get a threatening majority on the queenside.

15...♚a5

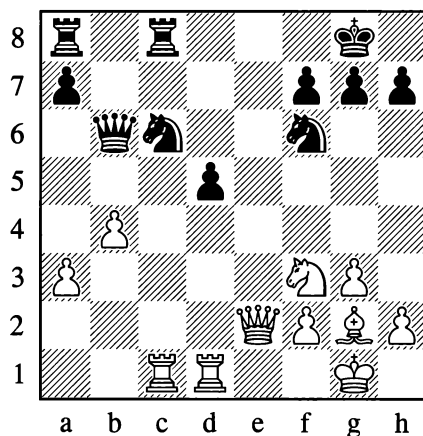
After 15...♚xc5? 16.♚xa6 White simply has a clean extra pawn.

16.♚c2!

White correctly refuses to exchange the queens.

It was important for White to calculate beforehand how after 16.♚xa5 ♘xa5 17.♘d4 ♜xc5 18.b4 ♜c4 19.bxa5 ♜c5 White's advantage would be decreased. That means he had to foresee 16.♚c2; otherwise, the whole operation would be mistaken.

16...♙xe2 17.♚xe2 ♚xc5 18.♜ac1 ♚b6
19.b4



This was the position that Carlsen wanted to reach. Black has a weak pawn in the centre and his pieces are passive for the most part. White has a pawn majority on the queenside and if we add the outpost on c5 to the list, we should start understanding why Black is in serious trouble.

19...h6 20.♚e3!?

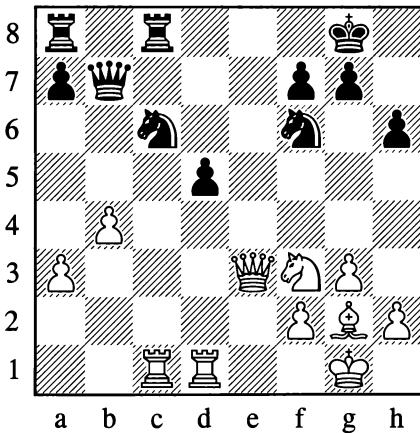
A smart move by White, allowing the damage to his structure to simplify the position. By offering the exchange of queens, Carlsen is

attempting to exploit the weak dark squares and increase the influence of his queenside majority. If Black refuses, his queen must go to a passive position.

20. ♖b2 was also worth considering.

20... ♖b7

After 20... ♖xe3 21. fxe3 ♖e7 22. ♖d4 the e3-pawn wouldn't be a real concern for White. You shouldn't be afraid of creating a weakness that cannot be attacked. If it can't be attacked, then how is it a true weakness?



21. ♗h3!

By putting the bishop on the h3-c8 diagonal Carlsen seizes control of the vital open c-file.

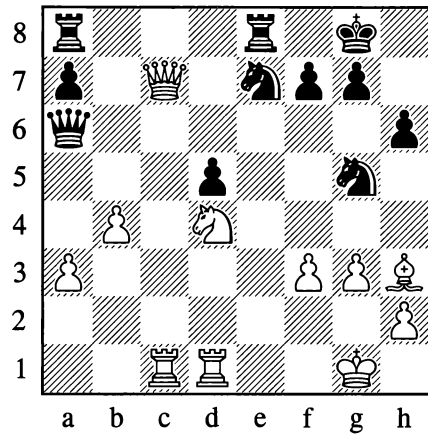
21... ♜e8 22. ♖c3 ♖e7 23. ♖d4

White gains even more ground with his pieces while the black forces are driven backwards.

23... ♖e4 24. ♖c7 ♖a6

If Black accepts the exchange of queens with 24... ♖xc7 25. ♖xc7 White will start pushing his queenside majority while Black struggles to find a single move.

25. f3 ♖g5



26. ♗d7!

It is important to keep the c8-square under the control of the white bishop to prevent the activation of Black's rooks.

26... ♜e8?

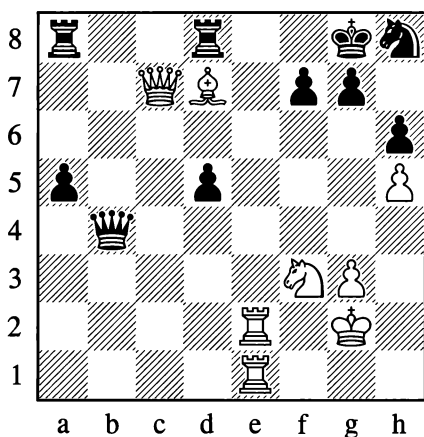
More stubborn resistance could be offered by 26... ♜eb8 threatening ...♖b7. After 27. ♖e5 ♜d8! 28. ♖xe7 ♖b7 29. ♖e5 ♜xd7 White has good chances to win, but the game goes on.

27. h4 ♖xf3?

Equivalent to resignation. Carlsen slowly but surely puts the game to bed.

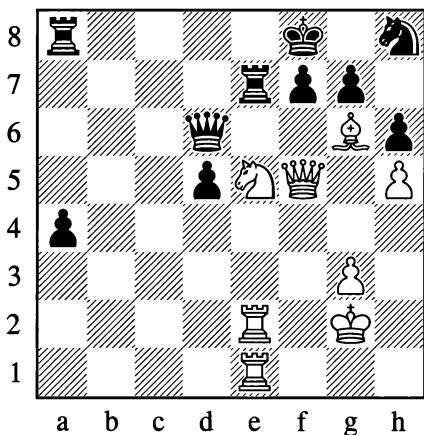
The only try was 27... ♖h7 but after 28. ♗h3 ♖g6 29. ♖c3 White's huge advantage is anyway undeniable. It's once again hard to suggest a productive move for Black.

28. ♖xf3 ♖xa3 29. ♖g2 ♖b2† 30. ♖d2 ♖xb4 31. ♖e1 a5 32. ♖de2 ♖g6 33. h5 ♖h8



White has driven the opponent's knight to a terrible spot.

34. ♖f5 a4 35. ♘e5 ♔d6 36. ♚c2 ♜e8
37. ♙h7† ♜f8 38. ♚f5 ♜e7 39. ♙g6



A picture of complete domination.

39... ♜g8 40. ♘xf7 ♜xf7 41. ♙xf7†

Black resigned.

1-0

Once again, Carlsen chose exactly the right moment to part with his bishop pair. He did not give his opponent the crucial tempo he needed to play ...d5-d4 and obtain a healthy position. What is more, the potential c5/d4

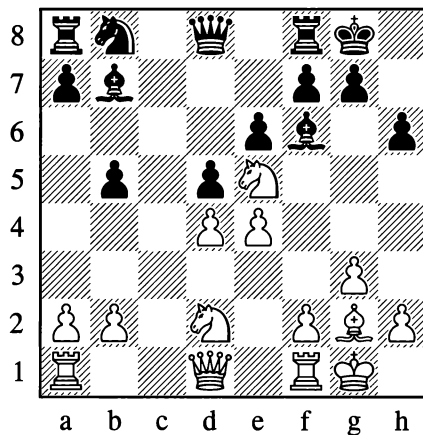
black pawn duo would seriously reduce the power of White's dark-squared bishop, so it made even more sense to exchange it before it could get restricted by the black structure.

What we learned so far is nicely executed once more in the following game.

Stefan Loeffler – Amir Bagheri

Warsaw 2005

1.d4 ♘f6 2. ♘f3 e6 3.g3 b5 4. ♙g2 ♙b7
5. 0-0 ♙e7 6. ♙g5 d5 7. ♘e5 0-0 8. ♘d2 h6
9. ♙xf6 ♙xf6 10.e4 c5 11.c3 cxd4 12.cxd4



Black has the pair of bishops but White is slightly ahead in development. The main question is how the b8-knight is going to be developed. If it goes to a6 then it is sidelined out of play. If it chooses c6 or d7 then White can exchange the knights and close the centre with e4-e5, rendering Black's bishop pair useless.

There is another solution:

12... ♙xe5!

Black correctly parts with his bishop pair to transform one advantage into another.

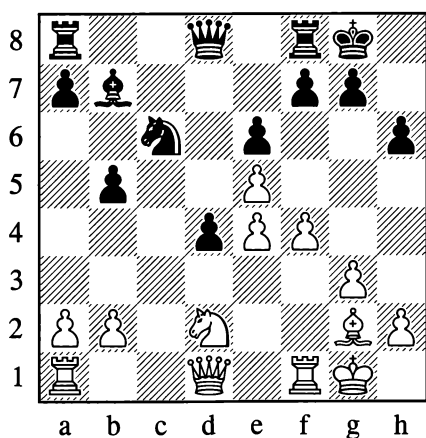
13.dxe5 d4!

Let's take stock of the situation. Black gained a strong central passed pawn, White's remaining minor pieces are restricted (especially the g2-bishop), the e5-pawn is weak, and Black is ready to develop actively with ...♘c6. It looks like Black struck a pretty good deal when he cashed out his bargaining chip of the bishop pair.

14.f4?!

Weakening the white kingside.

White should have chosen 14.♘f3 ♘c6 15.♖d3 ♗b6 16.♗fd1 when Black has only a slight advantage due to his passed pawn.

14...♘c6**15.♗h5?**

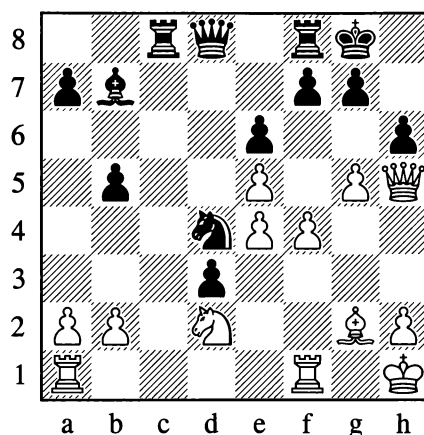
White overestimates his attacking chances and worsens his position once more.

15.♘b3 d3 16.♗d2 would be better.

15...d3!

Clearing the d4-square for the knight.

16.g4 ♘d4 17.♙h1 ♗c8 18.g5

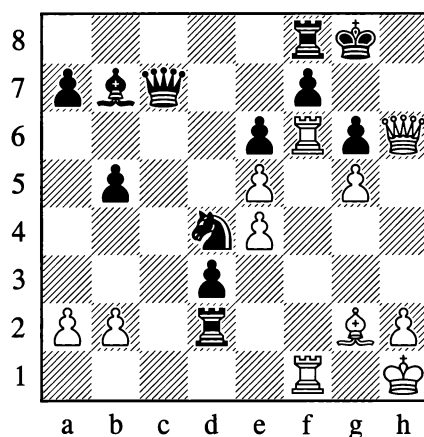
**18...♗c2!**

Black is not afraid of ghosts on the kingside and continues with his strategy of active counterplay in the centre.

19.♗ad1

After 19.gxh6 g6 20.♗d1 ♗h4 White is in a hopeless position.

19...hxcg5 20.fxcg5 g6 21.♗h6 ♗c7 22.♗f6 ♗xd2 23.♗df1

**23...♘f5!**

A nice finishing touch. Suddenly, it is Black's light-squared bishop that plays the final role in converting Black's advantage.

24.exf5

White made his move and resigned before Black could reply: 24...♙xg2† 25.♖g1 ♜c5† 26.♞f2 ♞xf2#

0-1

The reasoning behind giving up the bishop pair in this example was twofold. Abstractly, the transformation of the structure was to Black's benefit. In concrete terms and even more importantly, Black couldn't develop without allowing the centre to close. He had to develop though, which meant his bishop pair would have been robbed of its powers even if he kept it. In most cases with a static, closed centre, having the pair of bishops is meaningless.

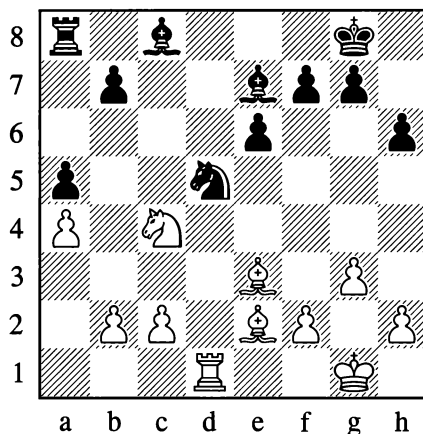
One could start questioning the merits of our analysis: Why was it so important for Black to develop immediately? Aren't you supposed to play slowly when having the bishop pair? Why would it be bad for Black to play small waiting moves? Isn't his bishop pair supposed to keep him safe? After all, White can't open the centre, Black's two bishops will dominate.

Hopefully, Carlsen's performance in the next game will answer these questions.

Magnus Carlsen – Nigel Short

London 2010

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♘d7 5.♗f3 ♙e7 6.♙c4 ♗gf6 7.♗xf6† ♗xf6 8.0-0 9.♗e5 c5 10.dxc5 ♜xd1 11.♞xd1 ♙xc5 12.♙e2 ♗e4 13.♗d3 ♙e7 14.♙e3 h6 15.a4 a5 16.g3 ♞d8 17.♗e5 ♗f6 18.♗c4 ♞xd1† 19.♞xd1 ♗d5

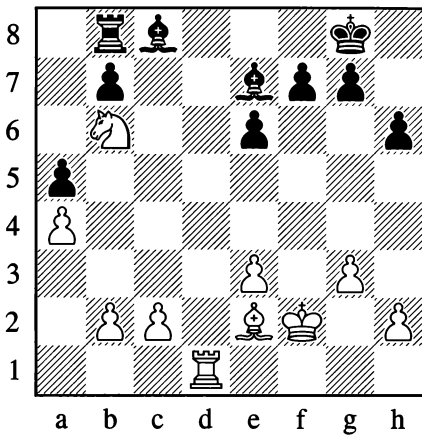


White has a pawn majority on the queenside and his rook is nicely placed on the only open file. Black's pieces are stuck, unable to develop and on top of that the weak a5-pawn always needs protection. To take advantage of Black's weaknesses and penetrate his camp, Carlsen begins by forcing the exchange of the pride of Black's position: the knight on d5.

20.♗b6! ♗xe3 21.fxe3 ♞b8 22.♗f2

Carlsen not only parted with his bishop pair, but he also accepted a weakening to his structure. Claiming that Black has an advantage because of his bishop pair and better structure would be insane. Let's repeat ourselves: A strong initiative renders long-term considerations obsolete!

Black is unable to develop without losing material.



22...e5

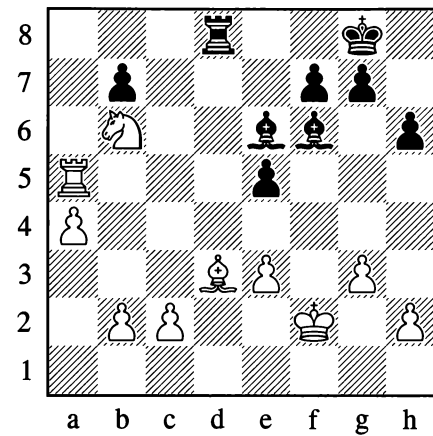
Black prevents White from playing ♞d1-d4 but the important pawn on a5 will fall.

22...f6 is met with 23.♞d4! threatening ♞d4-c4 . In the event of 23...e5 24.♞d5 Black can play 24...♙e6 getting the game continuation a tempo up, but it is not good enough. In fact, after 25.♞xa5 White can use the fact that the f-pawn is on f6 instead of f7 to forcefully trade light-squared bishops with ♙c4. Maybe Black was actually better off getting the same position a tempo down, with the pawn on f7.

23.♞d5 ♙e6 24.♞xa5

White's extra pawn and his queenside pawn majority decide the game. Black's bishop pair cannot provide him with enough compensation. The rest of the game is just a matter of technique.

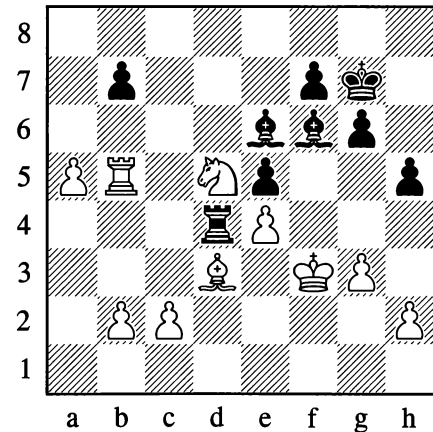
24...♞d8 25.♙d3 ♙f6



26.e4!

Carlsen does not allow the opponent to open the position for his bishop pair and secures the d5-outpost for his pawns.

26...♞d4 27.♞b5 g6 28.a5 ♖g7 29.♙e2 ♙g4† 30.♙f2 ♙e6 31.♙f3 h5 32.♙d5



32...♙d8

Black is fighting in vain. In the event of 32...♙xd5 33.exd5 the b7-pawn falls next and White has too many passers.

33.b4 ♙c8 34.♙e2 ♙g4† 35.♙e1 f5 36.♞xb7† ♙h6 37.♙e3 ♙f3 38.a6 fxe4 39.♙e2 ♙g5 40.a7

The a-pawn queens. Black resigned.

1-0

Carlsen did not hesitate for a moment to part with his bishop pair if it meant a great advantage in piece activity and obstructing the opponent's development.

This segment was a testament to a very important notion we have mentioned already: Do not hoard your bishops! Cherish them and use them as effectively as you possibly can. Bishops are usually slightly stronger than knights. However, it shouldn't sound weird by now that one of the main reasons they are stronger than knights is their ability to capture the slower-moving beasts. Be on the lookout for opportune moments like these.

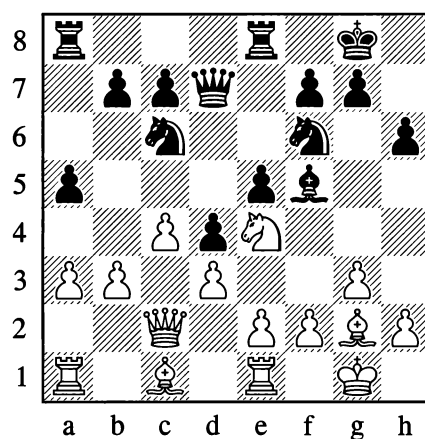
Playing Against the Bishop Pair

Of course, like with any other imbalance, having the bishop pair is not always an advantage. Consequently, when playing against the bishop pair, it only makes sense for us to try and create scenarios that will make the pair of bishops feel like a disadvantage instead of an advantage. The most usual case of this sort is to have a closed, locked position.

Efren Bagamasbad – Amir Bagheri

Cebu 2007

1.c4 e6 2.♘c3 ♘b4 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♙g2 0-0
5.♘f3 d5 6.♙b3 ♘c6 7.a3 ♙xc3 8.♙xc3
d4 9.♙c2 e5 10.d3 a5 11.b3 h6 12.0-0 ♙f5
13.♘d2 ♙d7 14.♙e1 ♙fe8 15.♘e4



15...♙xe4!

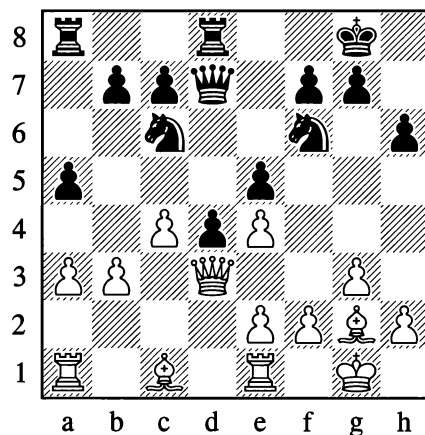
With White already having the bishop pair, it might look counterintuitive to give up the second bishop as well. Nevertheless, the dxe4 recapture blocks White's light-squared bishop, while the position remains closed and relatively stable. The conditions are ripe to showcase the power of the knights in a closed position.

15...♘xe4!? is also promising. After 16.dxe4 ♙e6 17.f4 f6 Black keeps a good advantage.

16.dxe4 ♙ed8

Black hints at ...d4-d3. His rook on e8 stopped being useful anyway.

17.♙d3



17...♔d6!

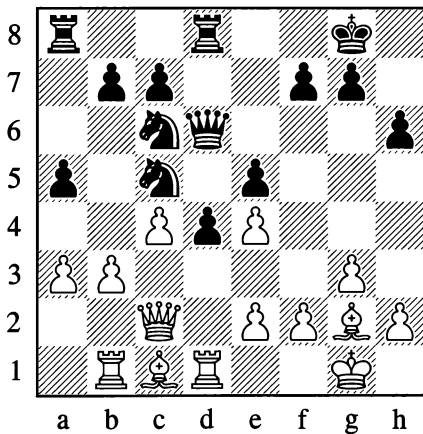
A multi-purpose move. It makes it even harder for White to play b3-b4, clears the d7-square for the f6-knight, and puts pressure on the a3-pawn, constantly tying one white piece to its defence.

18.♖b1 ♜d7

Black is slowly starting to bring more pieces towards the queenside.

19.♔d2 ♜b6

Threatening ...a5-a4.

20.♔d3 ♜d7 21.♖d1 ♜c5 22.♔c2

After a small dance between d7 and b6, the knight has finally landed on c5 and Black is in full control.

22...a4!?

Black did not need to rush with this move, but it had to be played at some point in order to make progress.

23.b4 ♜b3 24.♖d3 ♔e6!

Another multi-purpose move with the queen who has completed her previous purpose on d6. Black stops White from playing ♜h3, keeps an eye on the c4-pawn, and walks away from c4-c5.

25.♜b2 ♜e7?!

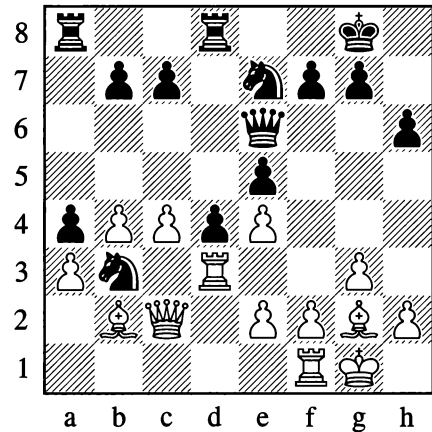
Black chooses the correct plan but the wrong move order.

He should have prevented White from playing c4-c5 first with 25...b6!, and only then proceeded with ...♜e7 and ...c7-c5.

26.♖f1?

A decisive mistake.

26.c5! was necessary.

**26...c5!**

Establishing complete control on the queenside.

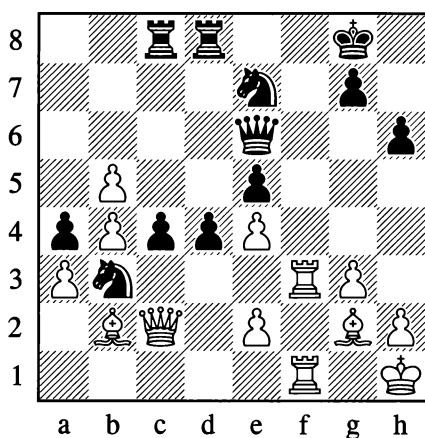
27.f4

After 27.b5 ♜c8 28.f4 ♜b6 29.fxe5 ♔xc4 the vital c4-pawn falls and White is completely helpless.

27...b5!

Crashing through.

28.cxb5 c4 29.♖df3 ♖ac8 30.♜h1 f6 31.fxe5 fxe5



Black has a decisive advantage. On top of having the beautiful c4- and d4-pawns, his knights remain much more impressive than the two terrible white bishops.

32...d3

White tries to complicate matters but it doesn't help.

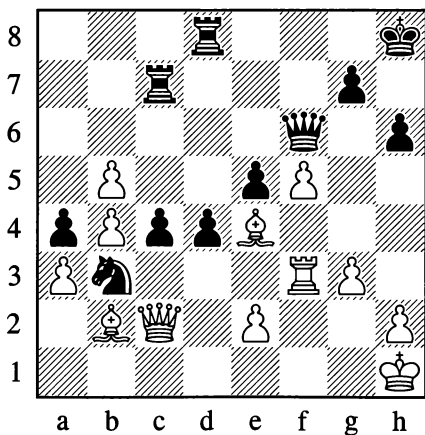
32...d3

Black didn't need to take this exchange, but it was probably the cleanest.

33.exd3 f6 34.b7 c7 35.e4 h8

No need to rush.

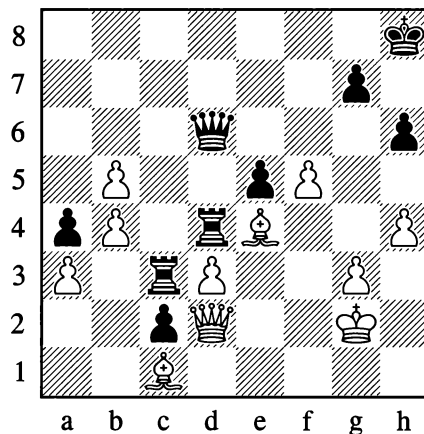
36...d3



36...d3!

A decisive breakthrough to penetrate the opponent's camp. Black is completely winning.

37.exd3 c3 38.e1 d4 39.g2 xf3 40.xf3 c2 41.f2 d4 42.h4 d6 43.g2 c3 44.d2



44...d2!

Eliminating the last obstacle. The game is over.

45.e3 d3 46.g3 d3 47.b6 d6 48.f3 b6 49.e4 d6 50.b5 d1

White resigned.

0-1

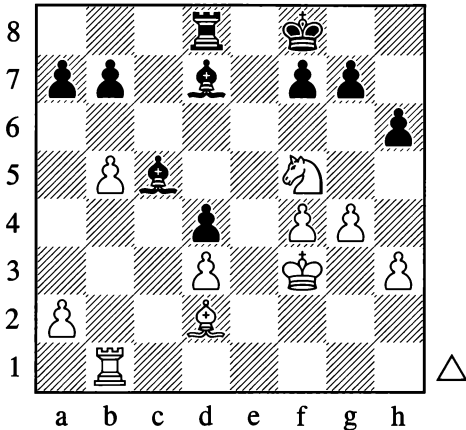
With the central structure locked, White's bishop pair had little power. In contrast, the black knights found plenty of options to manoeuvre and increase their activity.

It's not often that you can completely contain a bishop pair as in the game above. This is a strategy specifically designed for positions that are closed and stable. In most cases, the bishop pair's power cannot be tamed, and the best strategy is to try and eliminate one of the bishops.

The usual way to do that is to exchange our remaining bishop for the opponent's bishop of the same colour.

Magnus Carlsen – Varuzhan Akobian

Internet (rapid) 2017



32. ♖b4!

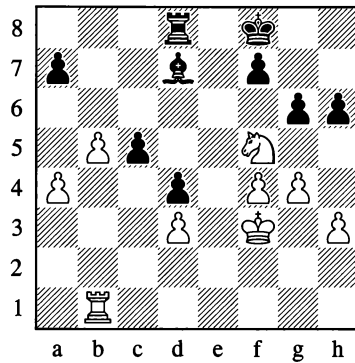
Black has the pair of bishops so White tries to eliminate one of them. By eliminating the c5-bishop White also manages to weaken the d4-pawn even further.

What is more, Black not having the bishop pair allows White to use his king as a fighting unit. With the bishop pair still on the board, there is no way the white king could be actively involved without getting in trouble.

Not to forget what we learnt in the first chapter about the “duel”, White’s king and rook are much more active than their counterparts. The more pieces get off the board, the more the disparity between the activity of these pieces is going to be felt.

32... ♗xb4

Another option was: 32...b6 33.a4 g6 34. ♗xc5† bxc5

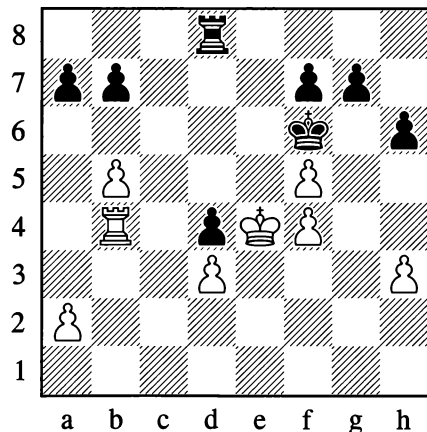


35. ♖d6! Domination. 35... ♗e6 (But not 35... ♗xg4?? 36.hxg4 ♗xd6 37. ♖e4 ♖e7 38. ♗c1 and White is already objectively winning.) 36. ♖c4 ♗e8 37.a5 ♖e7 38.b6 axb6 39. ♖xb6 White keeps a slight advantage.

33. ♗xb4 ♗xf5

33... ♗e6 would only help White after 34.a4. Due to the weakness of the black pawn on d4, Black anyway has to exchange his bishop for the knight.

34. gxf5 ♖e7 35. ♖e4 ♖f6



36. ♗a4!

Carlsen tries to drag the black rook to a worse position before taking the d4-pawn.

36... ♗a8?

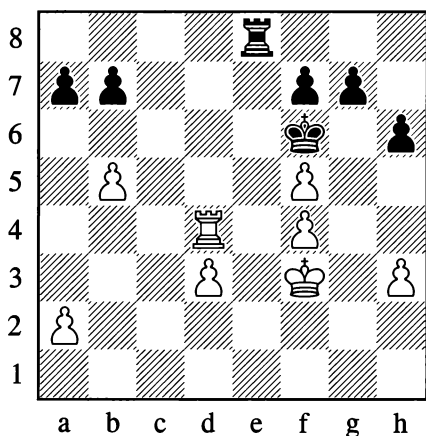
A typical rook endgame mistake.

We cannot skip the chance to mention one of the most important practical rules in rook endgames: a position with active pieces but a pawn down is preferable to a position with passive pieces and equal material. The same could be claimed for all endgames, but it holds even more value in the specific case of rook endgames.

According to this rule, 36...a6! would be correct: 37.bxa6 ♖e8†! Activating the rook. 38.♔xd4 bxa6 39.♞xa6† (39.♞a5 ♞e1 leaves Black enough counterplay to secure the draw.) 39...♔xf5 Black has enough counterplay on the kingside to guarantee that he is out of any serious trouble.

36...♞e8†! 37.♔xd4 a6! transposes.

37.♞xd4 ♞e8† 38.♔f3



38...♞e7

Black has to keep control of the seventh rank.

38...♔xf5? is a mistake. After 39.♞d7 a6 40.b6 White wins.

39.♞d5

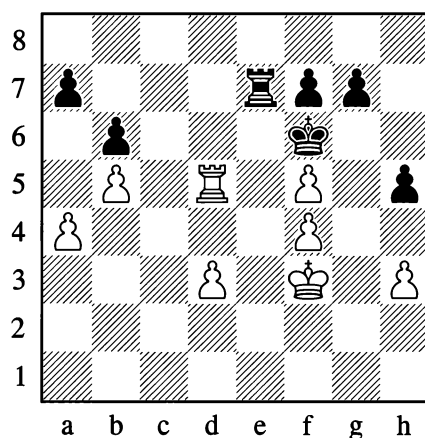
It looks like White is going to keep his extra pawn for a while, and Black has some difficulties obtaining counterplay because he has to stay put with his rook.

39...h5

39...♞c7! immediately going for ...♔e7, freeing up the rook, was Black's only way to save himself.

40.a4 b6?!

Black tries to claim he has a fortress by taking away the c5-square from the white rook. The rook did not need that square though. How is White going to make progress?



41.h4!

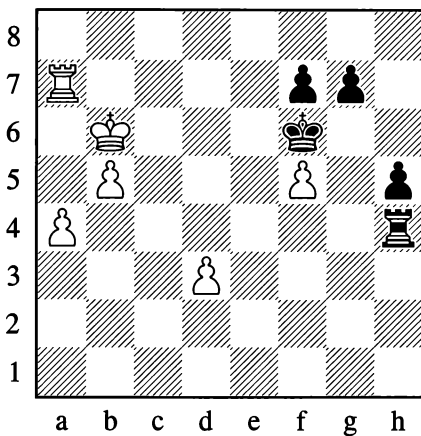
White doesn't need to make progress; Black's fortress will collapse on its own. He is already in zugzwang.

41...♞c7 42.♔e4 ♞c1?

Making White's task even easier.

Even after the more resilient 42...♞e7† 43.♞e5 ♞c7 44.♞e8 White is objectively winning because of the extra pawn and the more active pieces.

43.♞d7 ♞e1† 44.♔d5 ♞f1 45.♞xa7 ♞xf4 46.♔c6 ♞xh4 47.♔xb6



The advance of the white pawns on the queenside leaves no chance for Black to resist. The game is over.

47...♖b4 48.a5 h4 49.♖a8 ♜xf5 50.a6 g5 51.♖h8 ♜g4 52.a7 ♖a4 53.♜b7 f5 54.a8=♞ ♖xa8 55.♜xa8 f4 56.b6 f3 57.b7 f2 58.♞f8
Black resigned.

1–0

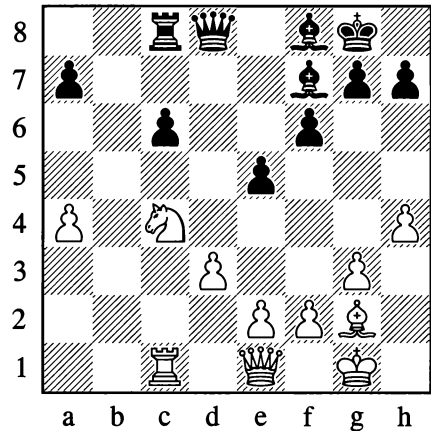
After Black lost his bishop pair he was left only with weaknesses and no activity to compensate for them. Furthermore, as we predicted, the white king was perfectly safe as an active unit.

In the previous chapter, we mentioned how in most cases, in exchange for an attack, the defender will have some long-term trumps because if they don't then the situation is completely one-sided. Something similar can be said about the pair of bishops. It's a common narrative for the player playing against the bishop pair to have a more compact structure. If they don't, then probably they don't have enough to positionally compensate for their missing bishop and they need to turn to tactical means.

In cases where we have a more compact structure, but the opponent has the bishop pair, if we can exchange one of the bishops, we might be able to seize a considerable advantage.

Ding Liren – Yu Yangyi

Shenzhen 2018



White has a better pawn structure and his pieces are more active than their counterparts. The only factor Black can count on is his bishop pair.

32...♙d5?!

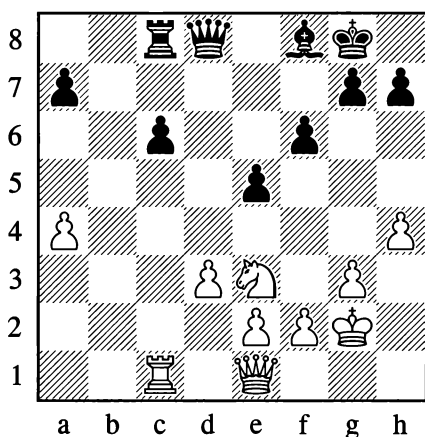
Black wants to exchange the bishops on d5 to repair his pawn structure; however, since Black has the two-bishop advantage, Ding will welcome this exchange but on another square!

32...g6 would be better, trying to put some pawns on light squares: 33.a5 ♙e8 34.♘e3 h5 35.♞d2 ♙d7 White keeps a slight plus, but this is much better than what happened in the game. Black keeps some chances of counterplay alive by retaining his pair of bishops.

33.♘e3!

Obviously, 33.♙xd5? is a big mistake: 33...cxd5 34.♘e3 ♙c5 35.♘f1 ♞d7 36.♞d1 ♙b6 37.♖xc8† ♞xc8 38.♞b3 ♞c5 39.e3 White has a tiny advantage. Black should be able to hold this without too many problems now that his structure is intact.

33...♙xg2 34.♘xg2



After the exchange of light-squared bishops, Black's pawn on c6 has become weaker and his king is in danger. Note that Black has already moved his pawn to f6, severely weakening the light squares on the kingside.

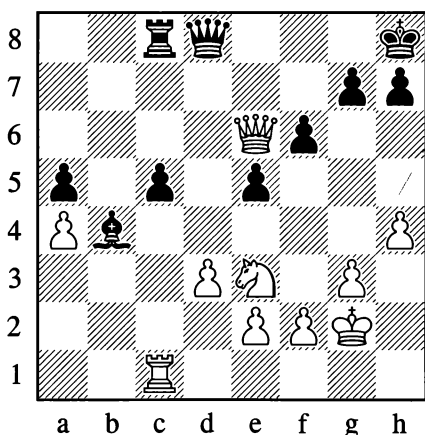
34...a5 35.♖c3

Ding intends to penetrate his opponent's camp using the weakened light squares.

35...♗b4 36.♖c4† ♕h8 37.♖e6

37.♗g4! was also worth considering: 37...♗c7 38.♗c4 c5 39.h5 White has a powerful initiative.

37...c5



38.♘d5

After forcing one of the few black pawns that was covering any light squares to move to c5, White immediately occupies the newly created d5-outpost.

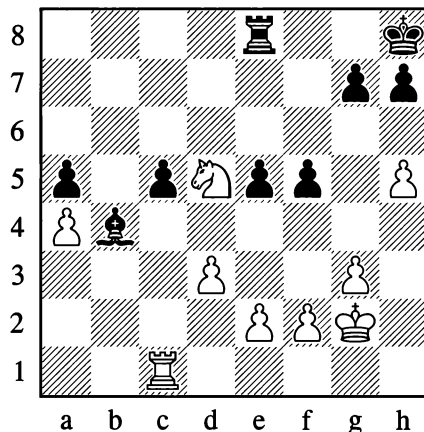
Since the black king is weak, it was slightly better for White to keep his queen on the board: 38.h5! ♗e8 39.♗g4 With a huge advantage. Nevertheless, the positional continuation chosen by Ding is also quite logical.

38...♗e8 39.♗xe8† ♗xe8 40.h5

White's long-term advantage is very pleasant. He has a better structure and enjoys having the mighty knight against the opponent's bad bishop.

40...f5

Black is trying to put his pawns on the light squares.



41.e4!

Strengthening the knight on d5.

41...g6

41...♗d8

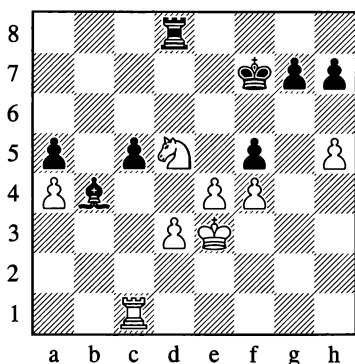
Could be met by:

42.f4!?

Trying to create a passed pawn.

The standard 42.♕f3 is also good.

42...exf4 43.gxf4 ♕g8 44.♕f3 ♕f7 45.♕e3



45...Bb8

In the event of 45...g6 46.♘xb4! cxb4 47.♞c5 fxe4 48.dxe4 White wins a pawn.

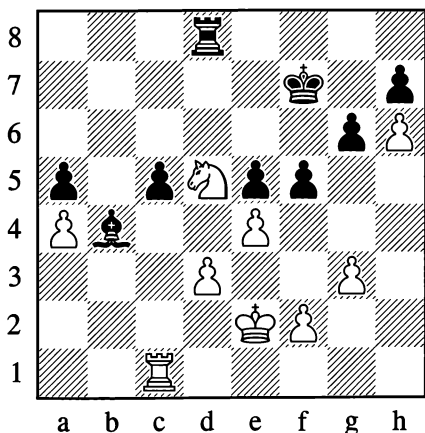
46.e5

Because of the weakness of the black pawn on c5 and the c4-outpost, as well as the activity of his knight against the opponent's passive bishop, White keeps a clear advantage.

42.h6!

Restricting the opponent's king as much as possible.

42...♞d8 43.♔f3 ♔g8 44.♔e2 ♔f7



45.♘xb4!

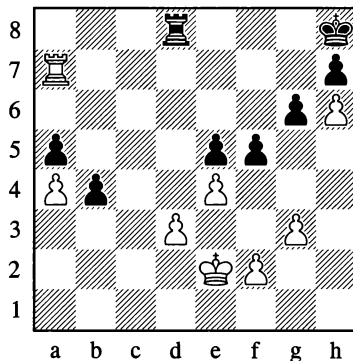
White transforms his advantage by trading off his good knight for his opponent's bad bishop. In return, he gets to infiltrate the

opponent's camp with his rook. Remember, only what remains on the board is important!

45...cxb4 46.♞c7† ♔f6

Another option was:

46...♔g8 47.♞g7† ♔h8 48.♞a7



48...Bb8

Black wants to push his b-pawn.

After 48...b3 49.♞b7 White wins the b3-pawn and retains all other advantages.

49.♔d2!

But not 49.♞xa5?!, due to 49...b3 and Black wins.

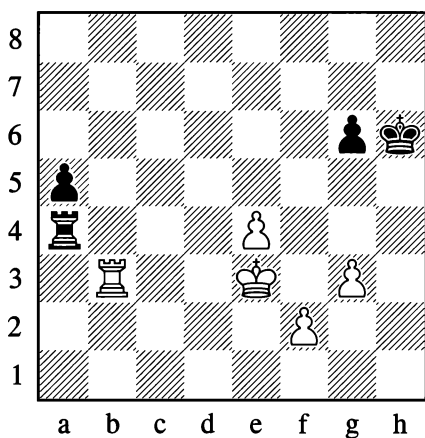
49...♞d8 50.♔c2 ♞c8† 51.♔b2

By transferring his king to the queenside to control the black b-pawn, White obtains a completely winning position. Note that due to the back-rank threat, Black's rook is tied to the defence and is unable to create any counterplay.

47.♞xh7

White takes the first pawn and is currently up a passed pawn on h6. Ding cleans up the game without too much trouble.

47...fxe4 48.dxe4 ♔g5 49.♞e7 ♔xh6 50.♞xe5 b3 51.♞b5 ♞d4 52.♔e3 ♞xa4 53.♞xb3



This endgame is completely winning for White, and the rest is a matter of simple technique.

53...♖a2 54.♖b6 a4 55.f3 a3 56.♖a6 ♜g2 57.♔f4 a2 58.g4 ♜f2 59.e5 ♖b2 60.♖a7 ♖b4† 61.♔g3 ♖b5 62.f4 g5 63.f5 ♖xe5 64.♖xa2 ♖e3† 65.♔f2 ♖e4 66.♔f3 ♖f4† 67.♔g3 ♖b4 68.♖a6† ♔h7 69.♖g6 ♖b3† 70.♔f2 ♖b2† 71.♔e3 ♖b3† 72.♔e2 ♖b2† 73.♔d3 ♖b3†

Black resigned without waiting for 74.♔c4 when the g5-pawn falls.

1-0

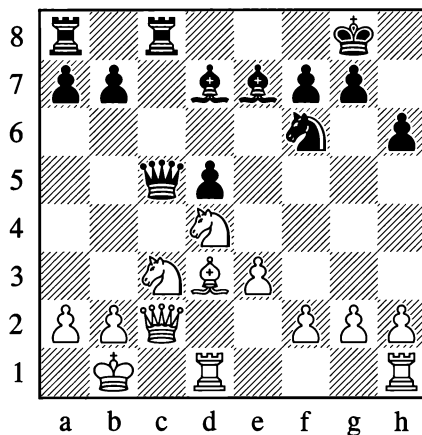
The starting position was unpleasant for Black but not lost by any means. After he made the mistake of acquiescing to the exchange of bishops the situation quickly became unbearable. White's superior structure gave him a huge advantage and Black was tied to passive defence, unable to create any serious counterplay. The decisive effect of exchanging off one of our opponent's bishops was demonstrated in crystal clear fashion.

An example with similar characteristics but a vastly more complicated nature can be witnessed below:

Kirill Shevchenko – Alexei Shirov

Struga 2021

1.c4 e6 2.♘c3 d5 3.d4 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♙g5 c6 6.e3 ♙e7 7.♙d3 ♘bd7 8.♞c2 0-0 9.♘f3 h6 10.♙f4 ♘h5 11.♙e5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♘f6 13.0-0 c5 14.dxc5 ♞c7 15.♘f3 ♞xc5 16.♘d4 ♙d7 17.♔b1 ♜fc8



The kings have castled on opposite sides so the game will sooner or later get sharp. Black's bishop pair and his ability to push his queenside pawns should give him enough compensation for his isolated pawn on d5.

18.♙f5!

Shevchenko gets rid of Black's bishop pair. What is more, since Black is trying to prove he has enough dynamic compensation for White's structural advantage, it makes sense to exchange pieces to reduce Black's attacking potential.

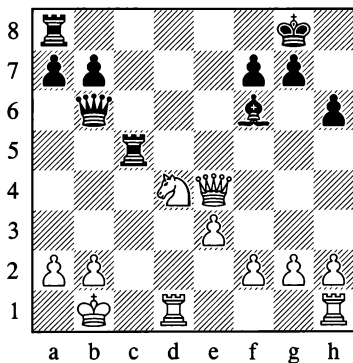
18...♞c7?!

Shirov wants to recapture the bishop with his rook but, in doing so, he moves his rook twice to place it on a worse square than the one it previously occupied. Thus, he relinquishes part of his chances at obtaining an attack on the queenside.

When we have an isolated pawn, we must try to play actively, otherwise we can easily slip into an inferior position. Of course, this is easier said than done. If that weren't the case, we wouldn't have one of the greatest attacking players to ever play the game fail to implement this strategy correctly.

A good, forcing way to play was:

18...♙xf5 19.♖xf5 ♖b6! 20.♘xd5 ♘xd5
21.♗xd5 ♗c5 22.♗e4 ♙f6



Black has lost the d5-pawn, but that was his only weakness. In return, he gained a few crucial tempos to activate all his pieces.

23.♗c1

In case of 23.g3 ♗ac8 Black has great compensation for the sacrificed pawn and stands at least equal.

23...♙xd4 24.exd4 ♗b5 25.♗c2 ♗d8 26.♗d1
♗bd5

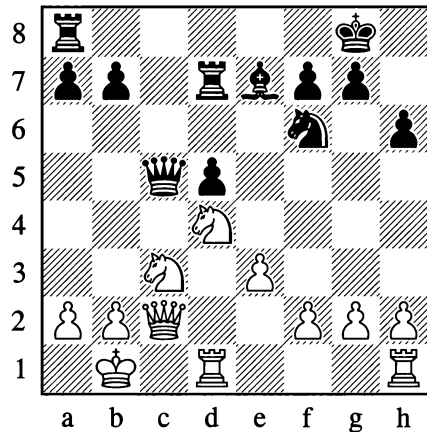
White's extra pawn grants him no advantage as, to keep it, everyone needs to passively hold on to it. White could start advancing his kingside pawns, but Black will also push his own pawns on the queenside. Of course, it feels better to have the extra pawn as you can always give it back, but Black should objectively be able to hold without any problems.

Another more "solid" way to play was 18...♙f8, getting away from any future ♘f5.

After 19.♙xd7 ♘xd7 20.♗d3 ♘b6 Black has good chances to create his own play on the queenside.

19.♙xd7 ♗xd7

19...♘xd7 loses to 20.♘xd5!.



20.♗d3

Since Black had already weakened his kingside with ...h7-h6, White could have tried to launch an immediate attack with 20.f3! planning g2-g4, h2-h4 and g4-g5. The pawn on f3 is also useful in restricting the mobility of the f6-knight.

20...♗c8 21.♗c1!

White allows Black the time he needs to claim approximate equality.

21.f3 with the idea of g2-g4-g5 would again be correct.

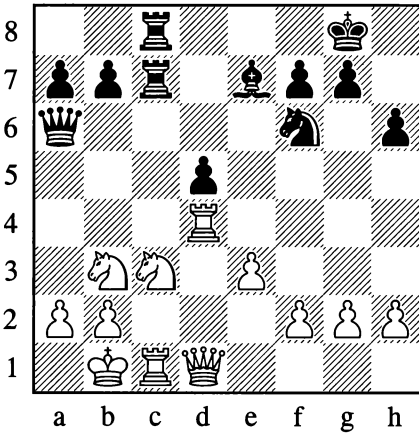
21...♗a5

Black should have preferred 21...♗d6! 22.g3 a6 23.f3 b5 with a complicated battle.

22.♘b3

22.f3! was again best.

22...♗a6 23.♗d1 ♗dc7 24.♗d4



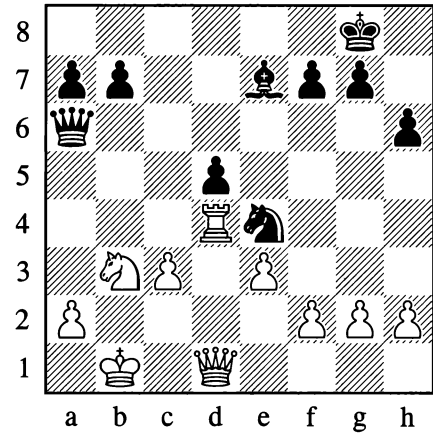
24...Bxc3?

“Fire on Board” does not work here. Afraid of losing the d5-pawn, Shirov sacrifices an exchange. However, White’s threat on the d5-pawn is not serious and Black had a lot of good moves to obtain counterplay.

For example: 24...b5! 25.♖d3 (In the event of 25.♜xd5? ♜xd5 26.♞xd5 ♞g6† 27.♖d3 ♞xc1† 28.♜xc1 ♞xg2 Black gets a winning position. Material might be equal, but the terrible c1-knight and the difference in king safety will prove to be decisive.) 25...♞c4 With excellent compensation for the isolated d5-pawn.

25.♞xc3 ♞xc3 26.bxc3 ♜e4

Shirov’s point behind the exchange sacrifice. He is threatening both the c3- and the f2-pawns.



27.♖d3!

Simple and strong. White keeps everything together and the extra exchange grants him a winning advantage.

27...♞c6

In the event of 27...♞xd3? 28.♞xd3 ♜xf2 29.♞xd5 White is completely winning.

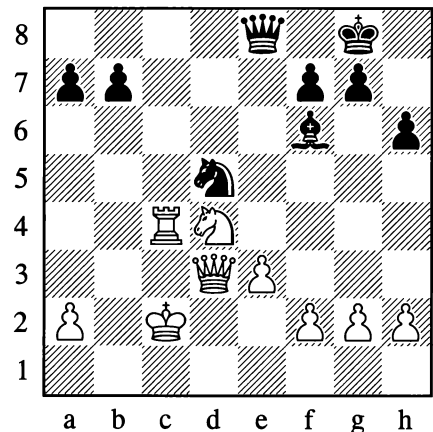
28.c4!

Undermining Black’s central knight.

28...♙f6

After 28...♜xf2 29.cxd5! ♞d7 30.♞e2 White wins.

29.cxd5 ♜c3† 30.♙c2 ♜xd5† 31.♞c4 ♞e6 32.♜d4 ♞e8



White's pieces are stable, and he managed to push back the black queen. The only problem is his exposed king.

33.♔d2!

His Majesty carefully marches to safety.

33...g6 34.♖c5 ♜b6 35.♕e2 ♔g7 36.♕f1

The white king is safe so the game is effectively over. Shirov tried to offer some resistance, but the result was never in doubt.

...1–0

After Shevchenko deprived Black of his pair of bishops, White's position was much easier to handle. Black had some ways to equalize, but none of them were obvious, to say the least.

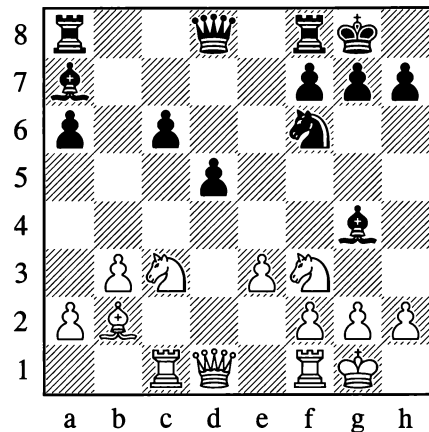
If Black had retained his bishop pair it would be a completely different story. For starters, White wouldn't be able to target the d5-pawn as he did in the game, as the bishop could have easily defended the pawn. Secondly and more importantly, Black's attack would have been a great deal more threatening.

In the next game, we will see Carlsen employing a similar concept, but through very different means.

Magnus Carlsen – Teimour Radjabov

Stavanger 2013

1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6 5.d4 d5 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♙b5 ♙d6 8.0–0 0–0 9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.b3 ♙g4 11.♙b2 a6 12.♙xc6 bxc6 13.♙c1 ♙a7



Black doesn't have sufficient compensation for his weak pawn duo on c6 and d5. Maybe even more important than the pawns' vulnerability is the weakness of the squares in front of them.

14.♘e2!

A simple but highly instructive decision. Carlsen is not afraid of weakening his king's position. On the contrary, he invites Black to take. If Black obliged, that would mean relinquishing the bishop pair, which is his only real asset. If Black doesn't take on f3, White will transfer his knight either to the central d4-square, threatening the c6-pawn, or to g3, supporting a future h2-h3 breaking the pin. At the same time, the text move opens the long diagonal for the b2-bishop.

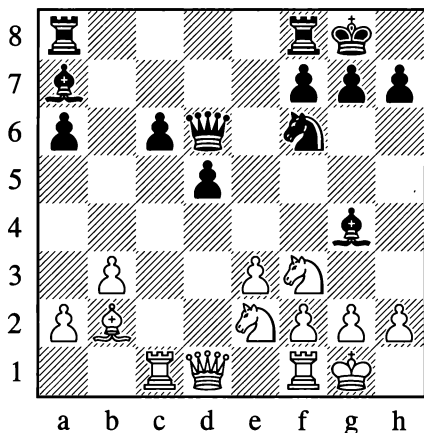
In an earlier game, White played somewhat awkwardly: 14.♘a4?! ♙d6 15.♙c4? Very artificial. 15...♙e6 16.♘c5 ♙c8 17.♙c1 ♘e4 18.b4 ♙xc5 19.bxc5 f6 20.♙d4 ♙xf3 21.gxf3 ♘g5 22.♙g4 ♙b8 23.♙c3 ♙b5 Black had a pleasant advantage and went on to win in U.V. Nielsen – Sax, Vejle 1994.

14...♙d6

Pushing the c-pawn would be a mistake: 14...c5? 15.♙xf6 gxf6 16.♘f4 d4 (16...♙e6 17.♙d2 leaves White with a decisive advantage.

He will simply continue with Bfd1 and start picking up pawns.) $17.\text{h3}$ Bf5 $18.\text{Nh4}$ Bg6 $19.\text{Wf3}$ The black kingside structure is ruined and the a7-bishop looks silly. Moreover, the white knights are ready to start exploiting the weak light squares with moves like Nd5 and Nf5 . Black is busted.

The “tempting” $14...\text{Bxf3}?!$ only helps White. After $15.\text{gxf3}$ Wd6 $16.\text{Wd3}$ Bfd8 $17.\text{Wf5}!$ White is the one developing a small kingside initiative while retaining all his positional pluses. The black position is on the verge of collapse.



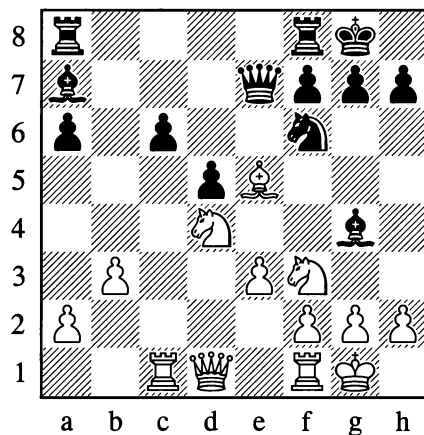
15. $\text{Be5}!$

It is quite logical to activate the bishop before closing the long diagonal with Ned4 . However, the bishop is going to be vulnerable on e5, giving Black various tactical possibilities to exploit its placement.

The simpler $15.\text{Ng3}!$ preparing h2-h3 gives White a good advantage.

15... We7 16. Ned4

Grabbing the pawn with $16...\text{Bxc6}?$ loses an exchange to $16...\text{Bxf3}!$ $17.\text{Bxf6}$ $\text{Wd7}!$.

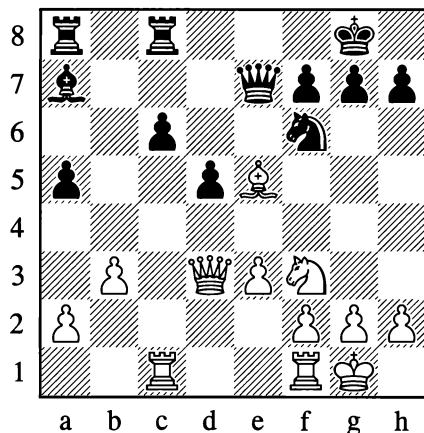


16... $\text{Bxf3}!$

Radjabov returns the favour. He will once again be slightly worse.

He could have equalized in a concrete manner: $16...c5!$ $17.\text{Nc6}$ We6 $18.\text{Bxf6}$ Wxc6 $19.\text{Be7}$ Bfc8 $20.\text{Bxc5}$ If not for this resource Black would even start feeling ambitious. $20...\text{Bxc5}$ $21.\text{b4}$ Wb5 $22.\text{bxc5}$ Bxc5 $23.\text{Bxc5}$ Wxc5 Black should hold this without any serious problems.

17. Nxf3 Bfc8 18. Wd3 a5



19. $\text{Bxf6}!$

Since Black has the weak c6- and d5- pawns, Carlsen cleverly exchanges his bishop with the opponent's knight before it appears on e4. In such structures, exchanging minor pieces,

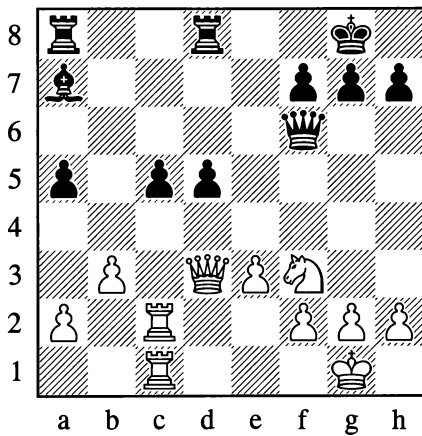
especially knights, reduces the opponent's activity and makes it easier to attack their weak pawns.

19...♖xf6 20.♖c2

Preparing to double rooks on the c-file, targeting the weak c6-pawn.

20...♖d8 21.♖fc1 c5

Ugly, but necessary.



22.e4?!

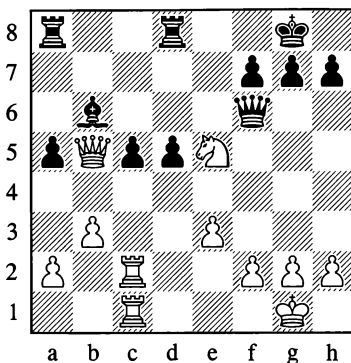
A miscalculation that eliminates White's advantage.

Stronger was:

22.♖b5! ♖b6

In the event of 22...h6 23.♖xa5 Black's passive pieces would promise no compensation for the pawn deficit.

23.♘e5

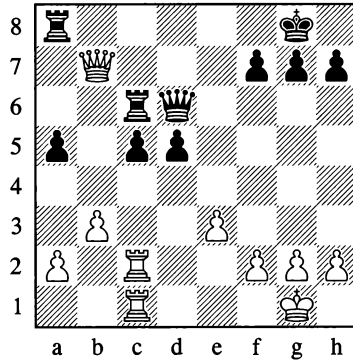


23...♗d6

Defending against ♘d7.

After 23...♖xe5 24.♖xb6 Black's hanging pawns finally appear vulnerable.

24.♘c6 ♖dc8 25.♖xb6 ♖xc6 26.♖b7



26...♖ac8

The only move.

26...♖b8 doesn't help: 27.♖a7 c4 28.♖xa5 White has a clean extra pawn while keeping up the pressure.

27.♖b5

After 27.♖xc5 ♖xc5 (27...♖xc5?? 28.♖xc8+ was White's trick) 28.♖xc5 ♖xc5 the position is balanced.

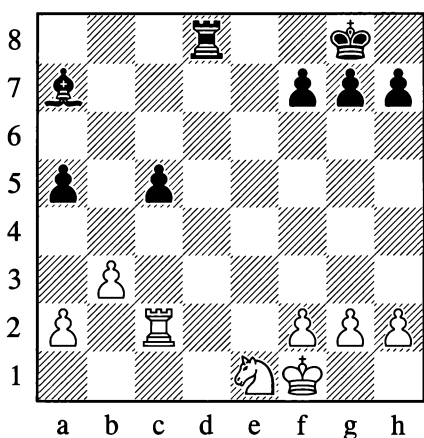
27...♖c7 28.♖d1

White keeps a slight advantage.

22...♖g6!

Maybe Carlsen overlooked this simple move. Black is OK.

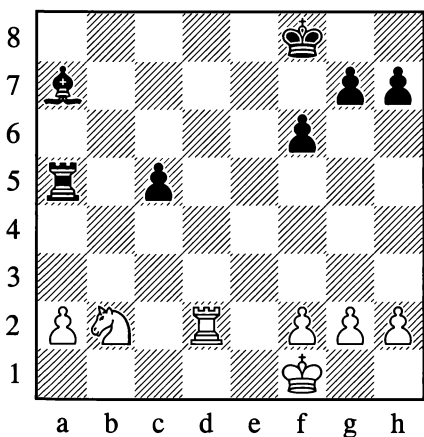
23.♖e1 dxe4 24.♖xe4 ♖xe4 25.♖xe4 ♖d1+ 26.♖e1 ♖xe1+ 27.♘e1 ♖d8 28.♘f1



28...a4!

With every pawn that leaves the board, Black gets closer to equality.

29.bxa4 ♖d4 30.a5 ♜a4 31.♞d2 ♔f8 32.♜d3 f6 33.♜b2 ♞xa5



Black has finally achieved complete equality. However, surprisingly even for him, Carlsen managed to win this.

...1-0

In this game, Carlsen managed to exchange off one of Black's bishops, but he did not do it by using his remaining bishop to hunt down its counterpart, like we saw in the previous examples. Rather, he did it by playing actively with his pieces to the point that Black felt obliged to capture the f3-knight. As we have already noted, the clean 15.♜g3! could have forced that capture. After Black gave up his pair of bishops it was clear that White was firmly in the driver's seat.

To sum up, when playing against the pair of bishops we should implement one of the three following strategies:

- 1) Close down the position to the point that the bishop pair becomes a liability.
- 2) Use your remaining bishop to hunt down and exchange its counterpart.
- 3) Play for the initiative, provoking the opponent to exchange one or both his bishops for one of your active pieces.

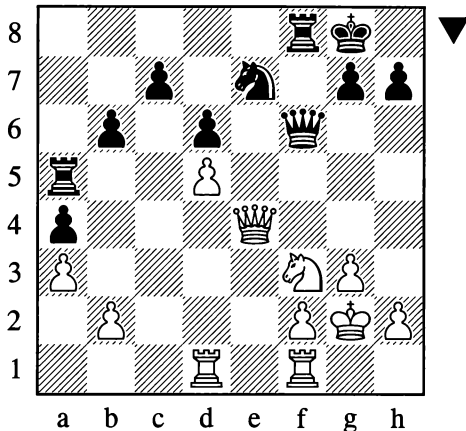
If you have some trumps of your own, then one of these three strategies should be good enough for you to have at least a decent position. If you don't, then good luck playing your toughest defence. However, even in dire cases, be on the lookout for a chance to go back to one of these three strategies.

A Better Structure

It's not rare for a superior pawn structure to be enough of a plus to singlehandedly guarantee the advantage. When this is the case, the side having the superior structure usually strives for exchanges, aiming to lead the game towards an ending.

Wesley So – Magnus Carlsen

Internet (rapid) 2017



Black has two pawn islands against White's three. However, White's centralized queen, his pressure on the open e-file, and his space advantage created by the d5-pawn give him good chances for counterplay.

22...Qxf5!

Carlsen cleverly offers the exchange of queens which, funnily enough, forces an exchange of knights. The fewer pieces we have on the board, the more pronounced his structural superiority will become.

23. Qxe7

The only way to keep the battle complicated.

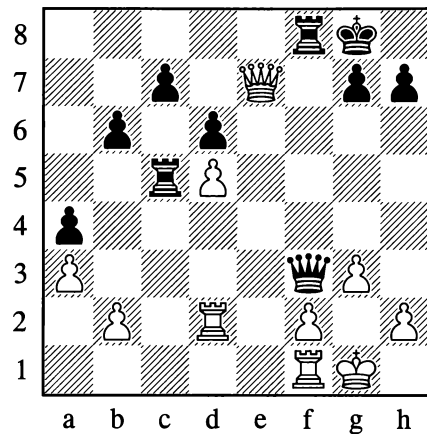
After 23. Qxf5? Rxf5 the d5-pawn falls without any compensation.

23. Qe6? would be met by: 23... Rf7! 24. Qh4 Qf6! Black sneakily threatens ... Rxd5, forcing 25. Qxf6 Rxf6 and he gets the advantage.

23... Qxf3+ 24. Kg1 Rxc5

Defending the c7-pawn and creating the threat of ... Rc2.

25. Rd2



25...h6

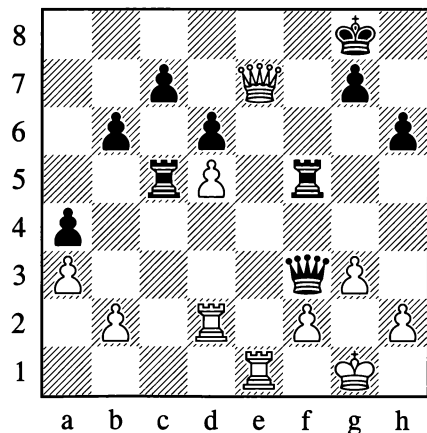
Carlsen makes luft for his king to free the f8-rook. Even though the d5-pawn is the main target, the weakness of the b2-pawn and the white king should also be taken into account.

26. Re1

Activating the rook.

26... Rf5?!

26... b5!? defending the a4-pawn was a better practical try.



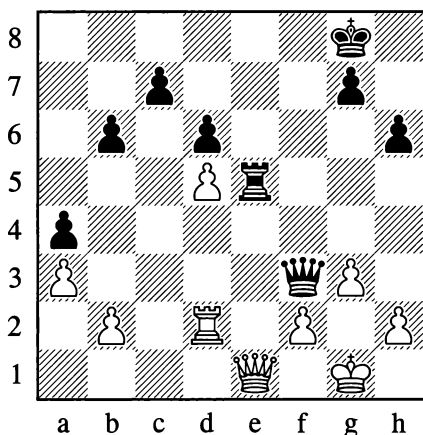
27. Re3?!

White returns the favour.

It was counterintuitive and required nerves of steel in a rapid game, but So should have gone for 27. Qe8+! Qh7 28. Qxa4, grabbing

an important pawn. After 28...♟fxd5 29.♟xd5 ♜xd5 30.h4 White has no serious problems and the most likely result is a draw.

27...♟c1† 28.♟e1 ♟xe1† 29.♟xe1 ♟e5



Both black pieces are much more active than their counterparts. The white pieces are tied down to the defence of the weaknesses on d5, b2, and the first rank.

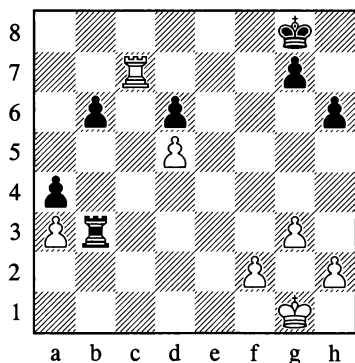
30.♟c1?!

Trying to exchange or drive away the black queen made more sense:

30.♟d1! ♟xd1†

30...♟e4 leads nowhere after 31.♟d4 ♟e2 32.♟xe2 ♟xe2 33.♟xa4 ♟xb2 34.♟c4 with equality.

31.♟xd1 ♟e2 32.♟c1 ♟xb2 33.♟xc7 ♟b3

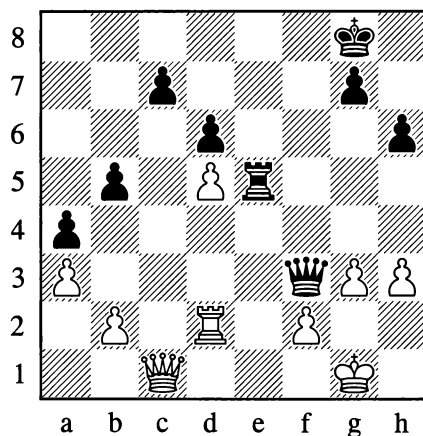


34.♟b7!

Keeping an eye on the b6-pawn while restricting the black king, with good drawing chances.

White's last move was very important. To illustrate, 34.♟c6? loses: 34...b5 35.♟b6 (35.♟xd6 ♟xa3 and Black's connected passed pawns decide the game.) 35...♟f7! 36.♟g2 ♟f6! 37.♟xd6† ♟e5 38.♟b6 ♟xd5 With an easy win.

30...b5 31.h3



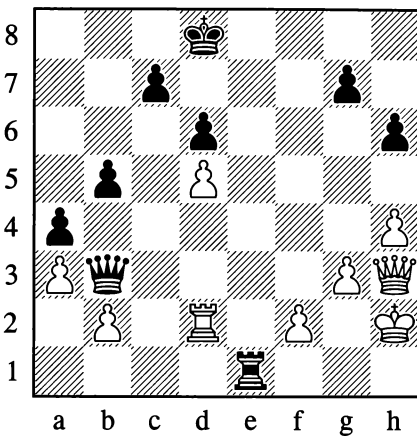
31...♟f8!

The Petrosian-style king walk. "Iron Tigran" really liked this operation and had performed it successfully numerous times in his games. Carlsen, realizing he has complete control, transfers his king to the queenside, for two reasons. Firstly, the king will protect the c7-pawn. And secondly, after vacating the kingside, Black may wish to advance his pawns on that side.

32.h4

Trying to go active with 32.♟d4! was the last chance. After the text move, White is doomed to passivity.

32...♟e8 33.♟h2 ♟d8 34.♟h1 ♟b3 35.♟g2 ♟e1 36.♟h3



White did make some inaccuracies during the last few moves, but only a computer can defend a position like that with precision. He's already busted.

36...♞f3

White's two main weaknesses are his king and the pawn on d5, and it seems he can't hold both at the same time.

37.♞g2 ♞f5 38.♞h3??

A fatal blunder in a bad position.

38.♞d4 wouldn't help: 38...g5! Preventing ♞f4 and creating the threat of ...♞e2. 39.f3 (After 39.hxg5 hxg5 transferring the black rook to the h-file will be decisive.) 39...♞e5 40.♞d2 gxh4 White can no longer parry the opponent's threats.

38.f4 or 38.f3 would have put up more stubborn resistance, but White was already objectively lost anyway.

38...♞h1+

0-1

The fewer pieces we had on the board, the more the superiority of Black's structure became the most influential factor. Such was Carlsen's dominance that he was even able to play 31...♔f8! followed by marching his king towards the queenside without allowing his opponent any counterplay.

Other important takeaways from this game are related to White's inaccuracies that eventually led to his demise. Both his chances with 27.♞e8† and 30.♞d1! were concrete in nature. When forced to passivity, we should always look at such chances to lash out. After both chances were missed, Carlsen succeeded in completely restraining his opponent's counterplay and the game ended quickly.

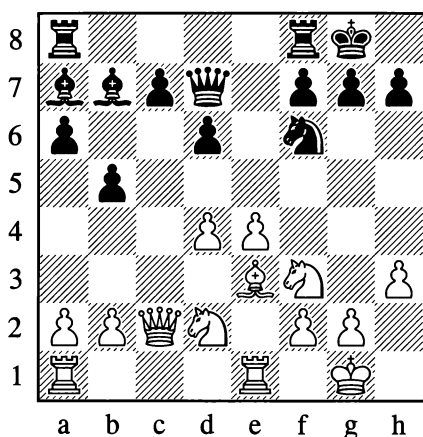
Prophylactic thinking and restraining our opponent's counterplay are vital tools to the cause of allowing structural superiority to overpower dynamic factors. As we have seen time and time again, if a side takes over the initiative, then it is likely that long-term observations can be thrown out the window. We should not let that happen.

On the other hand, the side with a structural disadvantage should strive for active counterplay and, if possible, the correction of their structure.

Pentala Harikrishna – Nihal Sarin

Solingen 2022

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.0-0 ♙c5 6.c3 0-0 7.d4 ♙a7 8.♞e1 b5
9.♙c2 d6 10.h3 ♙b7 11.♙e3 exd4 12.cxd4
♘b4 13.♘bd2 ♘xc2 14.♞xc2 ♞d7

**15.d5!**

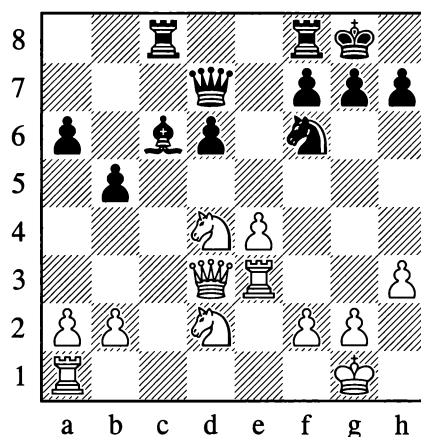
A multi-purpose move. White fixes the weak pawn on c7 and obtains the superior structure. At the same time, this move takes a page out of the previous segment and gets rid of Black's bishop pair while restricting the b7-bishop at the same time.

15...♙xe3 16.♖xe3

White plans to transfer his knight to the c6-outpost via d4.

16...♗ac8!

Black prepares ...c7-c6 with the intent of exchanging his weak pawn on c7 and activating the b7-bishop. If he had lost even a single tempo on anything other than playing or preparing the key pawn break, then White would get a clamp on the c6-square with ♖d4 and ♗c1, with a strategically winning position. When playing with a structural disadvantage, timing is always of the essence.

17.♕d4 c6! 18.dxc6 ♙xc6 19.♚d3

The pawn structure is very similar to the Sicilian Defence with the difference that instead of a pawn on the c-file, White has a pawn on the f-file. That gives him a slight advantage because the pressure on the e4-pawn can be nullified with f2-f3. However, Black's position is still quite healthy as all his pieces are active and it is not easy for White to immediately attack the weakness on d6.

19...♗fe8

After 19...d5? 20.e5 ♖e4 21.♗d1 White has a significant advantage due to his monster knight on d4 and his kingside pawn majority.

20.♗d1

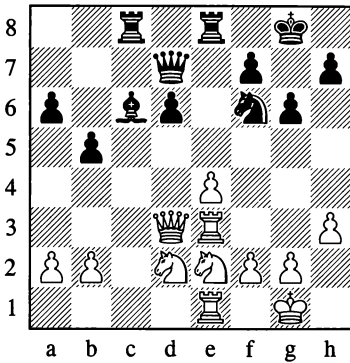
20.♕f5?! is premature and can be met with: 20...♙xe4! 21.♕h6† gxf6 22.♕xe4 ♕xe4 23.♗xe4 ♗xe4 24.♚xe4 ♚e6 25.♚d3 ♗c5 Black has no problems.

Another interesting option was:

20.♗ae1 g6

After 20...♗cd8 21.♕f5 White's pieces are active and, in addition to the weakness of the d6-pawn, it is possible to attack the black king.

21.♕e2



21...♖e7

21...♖d8 22.♖d4 leaves White with a slight but pleasant advantage.

22.a3

White achieves nothing after: 22.♗c3 b4 23.♗d5 ♕xd5 24.exd5 ♖b7 With equality.

22...♗d7 23.♗c3

With a slight advantage for White.

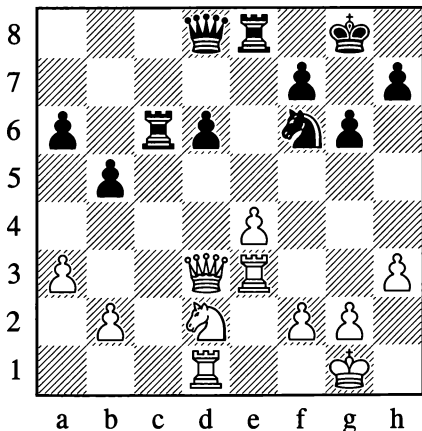
20...g6 21.a3 ♖d8?!

It would have been better for Black to keep his bishop on the board. After 21...♕b7 he is objectively fine.

22.♗xc6!?

The most logical. Black's bishop was strong in this open position.

22...♞xc6

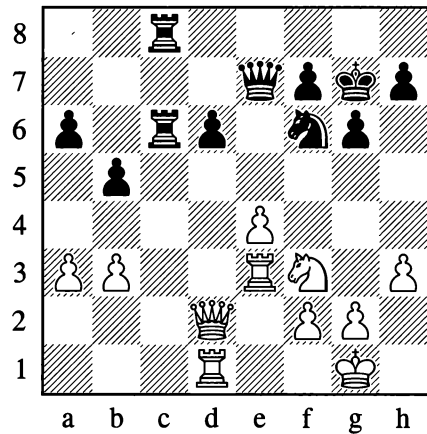


23.♗f3?!

Relinquishing most of White's objective and practical advantage.

Better was 23.♗b1! ♖b6 24.♗c3 when White blocks the semi-open c-file, controls the vital d5-outpost, and protects the e4-pawn all at the same time. He clearly has the easier game.

23...♖c7 24.♞e1 ♖b7 25.♖d4 ♖e7 26.b3 ♞ec8 27.♖d2 ♔g7 28.♞e3



28...♖c7

Black completely compensates for his backward d6-pawn by dominating the open c-file. White does not have any advantage anymore and the players found a way to quickly sweep everything off the board.

29.♞e1 ♖e7 30.a4 bxa4 31.bxa4 ♞c4 32.♖xd6 ♖xd6 33.♞xd6 ♗xe4 34.♞xa6 ♗c5 35.♞a7 ♞xa4 36.♞ae7 ♔f6 37.♞7e3 ♞ca8 38.♞c3 ♗e4 39.♞ce3 ♗c5 40.♞c3 ♗e4

A draw was agreed.

½–½

With 15.d5! White managed to seize a slight advantage due to his superior pawn structure. Black replied excellently with 16...♞ac8! and 17...c6! activating his b7-bishop while, even more importantly, getting rid of the c7-pawn.

Afterwards, White's advantage wasn't very big.

Nevertheless, the final turning point of the game came with 23.♘f3?! which allowed Black to take control of the open c-file and obtain enough counterplay for his weak d6-pawn. As we saw, 23.♘b1! would have given White a decent pull he could work with.

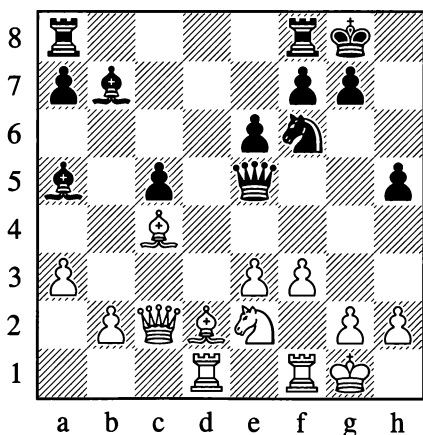
We already mentioned before the game that prophylactic thinking and restraining our opponent's counterplay are vital tools in converting our superior structure that's exactly what White failed to do with his 23rd move.

The first stages of the next game feature a different way of dealing with a broken structure.

Nihal Sarin – Vincent Keymer

Biel 2021

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 c5 5.♘ge2 d5 6.a3 ♙a5 7.dxc5 dxc4 8.♙d2 0-0 9.♘g3 b6 10.♙xc4 bxc5 11.♙c2 ♘bd7 12.0-0 ♙b7 13.♙ad1 h5 14.♘ge4 ♙c7 15.♘xf6† ♘xf6 16.f3 ♙e5 17.♘e2



Black has a broken structure, but his pieces are active. The common narrative would be

that White wants to initiate exchanges as endgames tend to favour him. The decision taken by the German prodigy might surprise you.

17...♙xd2!

Keymer exchanges the dark-squared bishops to put pressure on the opponent's weaknesses on the dark squares, like the e3- and b2-pawns. He had also surely prepared his follow-up.

17...♙c7?! keeps the bishop only to exchange it later, under less favourable circumstances. For example: 18.g3 h4 19.e4 ♙h5 20.♙f4 ♙xf4 21.♘xf4 If anyone has an advantage it is White, because of his superior structure and the bad b7-bishop.

18.♙xd2 ♙d5!

Black seizes the opportunity and, before the opponent can restrict the bishop on b7 by playing e3-e4, he exchanges it with the bishop on c4. That exchange will also provide the groundwork to push the c5-pawn forward.

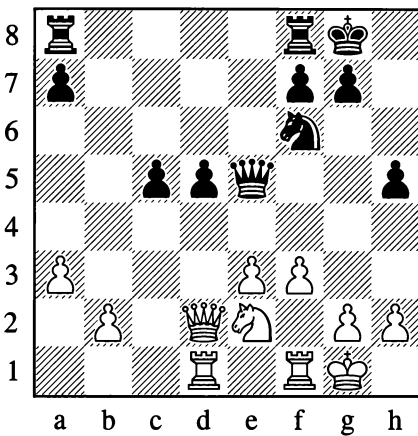
19.♙xd5

The capture is practically forced. If White denies it then Black gets a strong initiative by simply putting his rooks on the open files.

19...exd5

The most natural.

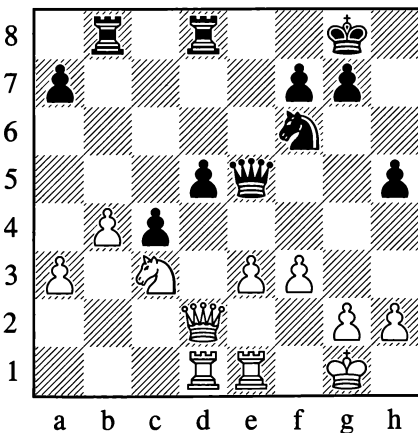
Even though recapturing with the e-pawn seems automatic due to the weakness of the white pawn on e3 and the creation of hanging pawns on c5 and d5 that become more mobile, it would be even better for Black to take back the pawn with the knight for tactical reasons. We have seen a similar position and a black win, in the game Dao – Bagheri in Chapter one. After 19...♘xd5! 20.e4 ♙ab8! 21.♙b1 ♘b6 Black has a good initiative on the queenside.

**20.b4!**

One of the standard plans against the hanging pawns. White fights for the dark squares in the centre and on the queenside.

20...c4

20...cxb4 would be enough for equality and probably a better option: 21.axb4 ♖fe8 22.♟f4 ♜xe3† 23.♜xe3 ♞xe3 24.♟xd5 ♟xd5 25.♞xd5 With a drawn endgame.

21.♟c3 ♞fd8 22.♞fe1 ♞ab8**23.♜d4!**

White has a slight advantage due to the queenside pawn majority and the nice blockade against the c4- and d5-pawns.

23...♜e7 24.b5!

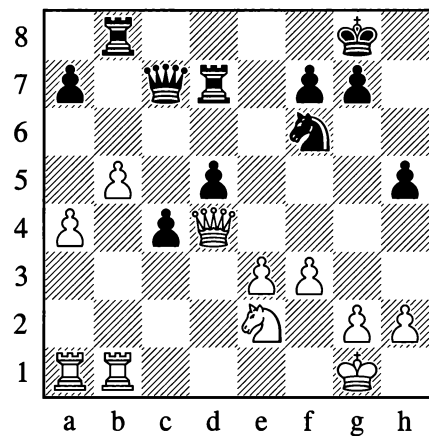
White gains as much space as he can on the queenside.

24...♞d7

After 24...♜xa3 25.♞a1 ♜d6 26.♞xa7 White remains a slight favourite.

25.a4 ♜b4 26.♞a1 ♜a5 27.♟e2 ♜c7 28.♟c3 ♜a5 29.♟e2 ♜c7 30.♟c3 ♜a5 31.♟e2 ♜c7 32.♞eb1

The position was actually repeated three times in the above sequence, but neither side claimed a draw. White now decides to continue the fight.

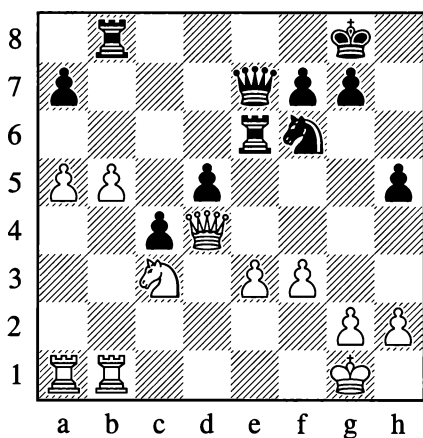
**32...♞d6?!**

This dubious move increases White's advantage.

Trying to block the pawns with 32...♜a5?! is a mistake due to 33.♜c3! and White is much better.

32...♞e8! was correct, targeting the weak e3-pawn. After 33.a5 ♞de7 White only has the easier side of equality.

33.a5 ♞e6 34.♟f4 ♞d6 35.♟e2 ♞e6 36.♟c3 ♜e7



37.♞e1?!

An unnecessary defensive move.

After a lot of back and forth with White calling the shots, it is sometimes hard to remind yourself that at some point you need to do something concrete and take a few risks to score the full point. 37.b6! axb6 38.♞xb6 was strong, with White having good chances to win.

39...♞c7 40.♞a2 ♞be8 41.h4 ♔h7 42.♞e2

39.b6! should have been played once again.

39...♞c7 40.♞a2 ♞be8 41.h4 ♔h7 42.♞e2 ♔g8 43.♞a1 ♔h7 44.♞a2 ♔g8 45.♞a1 ♔h7

Nihal agreed to a draw in a slightly better position even though, to be fair, most of his advantage is gone by now. Black managed to target the e3-pawn and it will be hard for White to make progress on the queenside without something happening to him on the kingside.

½-½

Even though general principles state that the side with the broken structure should refrain from exchanges, you should take this advice with a grain of salt. In this game, Vincent Keymer correctly chose to exchange both his bishops

with 17...♞xd2! and 18...♞d5! despite having a broken structure. The first exchange facilitated the weakening of White's control over the dark squares, loosening the e3- and b2-pawns. The second exchange was about getting rid of his worst-placed piece before White could blunt the long diagonal with e3-e4, as well as improving his structure with 19...exd5.

However, as we have already mentioned, 19...♞xd5! was even better, keeping the broken structure but instead getting some initiative against the weak white pawns. We may sound like a broken record, but we cannot stress the importance of this point enough: if a player grabs the initiative, then any long-term considerations could become irrelevant.

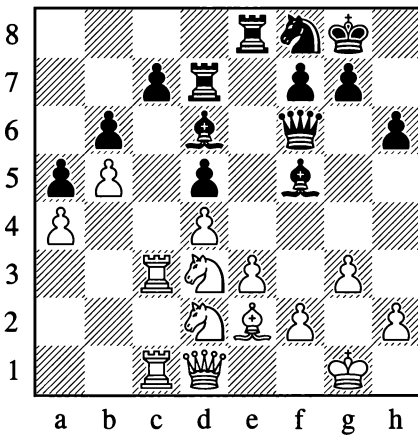
It's also highly instructive to highlight the moment on White's 37th. It's very common for players trying to convert any type of long-term advantage to miss their chances when they finally come up. It's very psychologically demanding for people to change gears from playing a slow, improving game to suddenly forcing matters. We must always be vigilant because we don't know when our chance to strike might come up.

Next up is a positional masterpiece by Magnus Carlsen where he uses his better structure in textbook fashion.

Magnus Carlsen – Levon Aronian

Wijk aan Zee 2015

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♞b4 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♞g5 h6 7.♞xf6 ♞xf6 8.♞a4† ♘c6 9.e3 0-0 10.♞e2 ♞e6 11.0-0 a6 12.♞fc1 ♞d6 13.♞d1 ♘e7 14.a3 ♞fd8 15.b4 ♘c8 16.♘a4 b6 17.♘b2 ♘e7 18.♘d3 ♘g6 19.a4 a5 20.b5 ♞e8 21.♞c3 ♞f5 22.♞ac1 ♞ad8 23.♘d2 ♞d7 24.g3 ♘f8



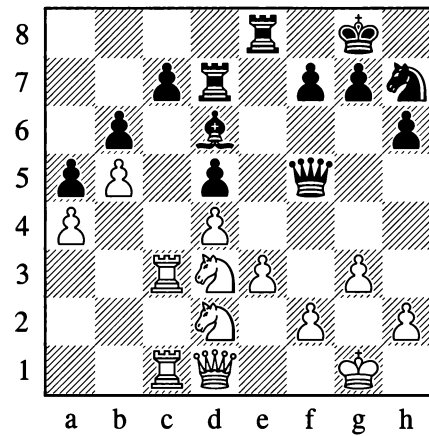
At first, it might seem like both structures are quite healthy. Black has two pawn islands, just like White does. However, that's not the full picture. In essence, Black has three pawn islands as the d5-pawn is isolated from the rest of his queenside structure. The d5-pawn and the c7-pawn are both weaknesses, while White's structure is rock solid. None of the white pawns can come under attack. Carlsen will make full use of this disparity in the quality of the structures to get the full point.

25. ♗g4!

Excellent judgement. White's light-squared bishop is classically considered better than Black's, due to the colour of the central pawn chains. Nevertheless, when contemplating a trade, you should keep in mind: the most important consideration is not what leaves the board, but what remains!

The pawn on d5 and the c6-square are on light squares and after exchanging the light-squared bishops, Black will be unable to protect them. At the same time, White deprives Black of his bishop pair, the only asset he could really claim he had. Moreover, exchanging pieces furthers White's goal of increasing the influence exerted by his better structure.

25... ♖h7 26. ♗xf5 ♜xf5



27. ♜f3!

White is much better statically, so why not get the most unpredictable piece off the board?

27... ♗g5

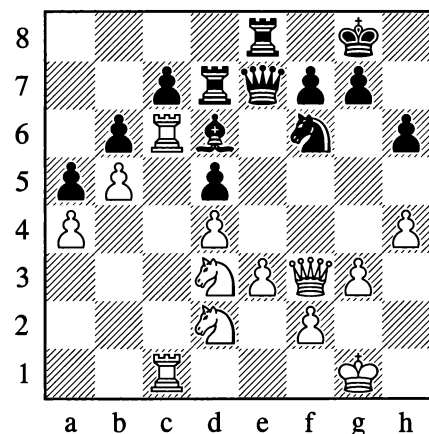
By keeping the queens on, Black hopes to annoy White, at least practically, with a bunch of different piece sacrifices on the kingside.

After the exchange of queens, Black wouldn't have a shred of counterplay: 27... ♜xf3 28. ♖xf3 ♜f6 29. h4 ♜e4 30. ♗c6 White's huge advantage is undeniable.

28. h4!

White's domination in central control makes a flank attack totally justified.

28... ♜e7 29. ♗c6 ♜f6



30. ♖f4

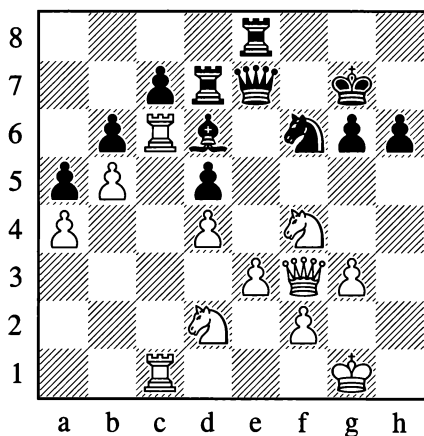
It is very instructive to note how Carlsen plays on both sides of the board, using the X-ray influence provided to the kingside by the c6-rook.

30...g6 31.h5!

Very accurate. Carlsen pre-emptively creates more kingside weaknesses before opening the game.

31...♔g7

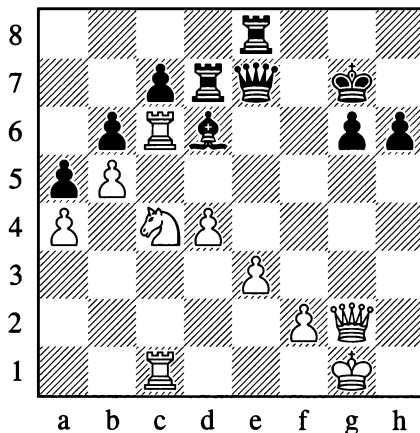
Trying to close the kingside with 31...g5 doesn't help at all. After 32. ♖xd5! ♖xd5 33. ♗xd5 White gets an even better version of the game.

32.hxg6 fxg6**33. ♖xd5!**

After weakening the black kingside, the decisive tactical blow lands in the centre. Carlsen is not afraid of Black's discovered attack. He grabs the central pawn and at the same time creates attacking options for his d2-knight. If that knight is allowed to come to c4 and take the d6-bishop, the black construction will collapse.

33... ♖xd5 34. ♗xd5 ♖xg3 35. ♗g2 ♖d6 36. ♖c4

The previously passive knight comes into play, increasing the pressure. All the white pieces cooperate beautifully.

**36...♖f8?**

This mistake increases White's advantage, but Black's position was already hanging by a thread.

A better try was:

36...♗d8 37. ♖xd6

But not 37. ♖e5? ♖xe5 38. ♗xg6†?? (38.dxe5 ♖d1† 39. ♖xd1 ♗xd1† 40. ♔h2 ♗h5† leads to equality) 38... ♔h8 and Black wins.

37...cxd6 38. ♗g4 ♖f7 39. ♖c8 ♗e7 40. ♖xe8 ♗xe8 41. ♗g3 ♗d8 42. ♖c6 ♖f6

White has a decisive advantage, but it's still a better try than what happened in the game as Black can continue fighting.

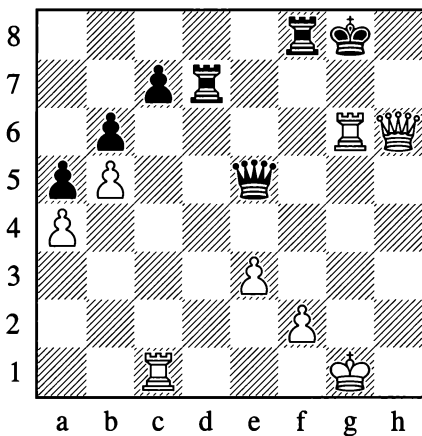
37. ♖e5!

The disharmony plaguing the black pieces and the weakness of his king allow White to finish the game tactically.

37... ♖xe5 38. ♗xg6† ♔h8 39. ♗xh6†

The black king's shelter is demolished.

39... ♔g8 40.dxe5 ♗xe5 41. ♖g6†



The game is over.

41...♔f7 42.♖c4 ♜a1† 43.♔g2 ♜h8 44.♖f4†
 ♔e8 45.♖e6† ♖e7 46.♖xe7† ♔xe7 47.♖e4†
 Black saw 47...♔d8 48.♖d4† ♜xd4 49.♜g5†
 and decided to resign.

1–0

A marvellous effort by Carlsen, who used his superior structure in every possible manner. He conquered the c6-square and put pressure on the d5-pawn. Both became possible only after the exchange of light-squared bishops. He tied down the d6-bishop to the defence of the backward c7-pawn and used this bishop's inability to exchange itself (if it did the c6-rook would become a monster), to get an excellent knight on f4. After achieving maximum activity for each of his pieces, he used the disparity in central control to launch a flank attack with h2-h4-h5. With the black king severely weakened, it was time to make the position explode, which he promptly achieved by the well-calculated strike 33.♜xd5!

You can't get much cleaner examples than that – and the hugely impressive part is it was played against the fourth highest-rated player in the history of the game.

The course of this game is highly instructive, as it followed the textbook path of converting an advantage in structure:

- 1) Underline the weaknesses in the opponent's structure. (25.♙g4!)
- 2) Use these weaknesses to obtain the more active pieces. (27.♜f3!, 28.h4!, 29.♞c6, 30.♜f4)
- 3) Use the new-found disparity in activity to deliver the final blows. (31.h5!, 33.♜xd5!, 37.♜e5!)

In three out of the four games in this segment, the side with the better structure proposed a queen exchange and it was denied. In all cases, it was right to deny the exchange. That brings us to our next segment.

The Queen Exchange

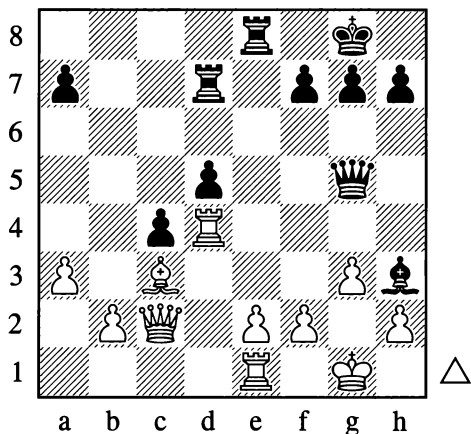
The presence of queens radically alters the nature of a position, and therefore special attention should be paid when deciding who benefits by keeping them on or getting them off the board. It is, in general, more important to the course of the game compared to exchanging other pieces.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the most common factor that should be evaluated when exchanging queens is the relative safety of the kings. The side with the safer king would like to keep the queens on the board, while the side that lacks king safety wants the queens to be exchanged.

Another way of looking at the same thing is asking ourselves: which side benefits from reaching an endgame? An endgame almost always favours the side holding the most long-term advantages.

Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin

St. Louis 2018



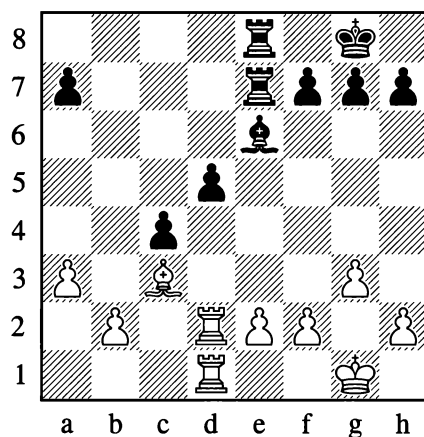
23. ♔d2!

Having a better pawn structure, Carlsen correctly decides to offer the exchange of queens. Black has three pawn islands while White has two, and the d5-pawn is backward. Black's only hope is the presence of opposite-coloured bishops, which currently makes the white king feel slightly uncomfortable.

23... ♕xd2

Keeping the queens on the board with 23... ♕d8 does not help much. After 24. f3 ♕b6 25. ♖h1 with ideas of e2-e4 or g3-g4, White is clearly the only player that can create threats. This is usually enough for an objective advantage but it's also practically very pleasant.

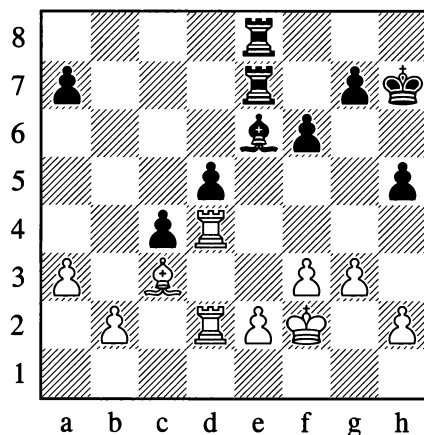
24. ♖xd2 ♙e6 25. ♖ed1 ♖de7



26. f3

White wants as many pawns as he can to be put on light squares so that he can control both colour complexes.

26...h5 27. ♖f2 f6 28. ♖d4 ♖h7 29. ♖1d2

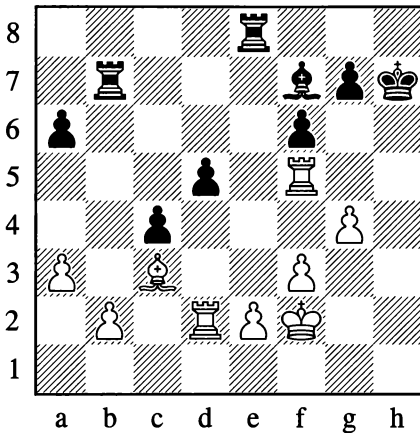


Carlsen is not interested in clarifying the position with e2-e4. His advantage is completely permanent, based on the comparison between the two structures and the activity of the bishops. So, he will not rush. On the contrary, he will make as many improving moves as he can possibly think of before attempting to crash through. This completely one-sided affair started when the exchange of queens left Black with absolutely no counterplay.

29...♙f7 30.h3

Another pawn on a light square.

30...a6 31.♖f4 ♘g8 32.♙d4 ♖h7 33.♙c3
 ♘g8 34.g4 hxg4 35.hxg4 ♘h7 36.♖f5 ♖b7
 36...♞d7 would offer more stubborn
 resistance.

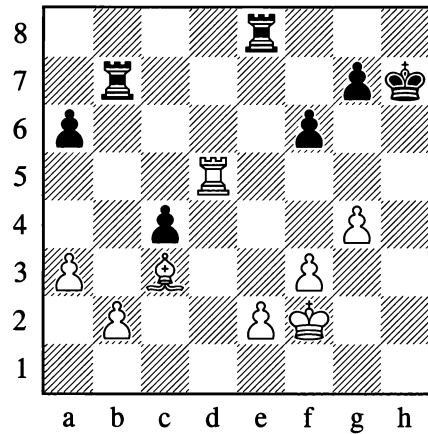


White has made close to maximum progress on the centre and kingside. All his pawns are on light squares, and he has grabbed quite a bit of space. Still, the black position looks like a fortress.

37.♖fxd5!

A strong exchange sacrifice that engines cannot understand. There was no other way of destroying the black fortress. It doesn't matter that the position objectively remains a draw. White clearly has the upper hand and Black gets a new set of problems to solve.

37...♙xd5 38.♖xd5



White has a pawn for the exchange, but his strong, stable bishop dominates the dark squares, and the c4-pawn is quite weak. Carlsen eventually won the game using his brilliant technique. We won't comment on the continuation of the game as it is out of our subject, but to satisfy your curiosity:

38...♙g6 39.♖c5 ♖h8 40.♙g3! ♖b6 41.♖xc4
 ♖h1 42.♖c7 ♖c1 43.♞d7 ♖c6 44.a4 ♖g1†
 45.♙f2 ♖a1 46.a5 ♖a4 47.♙g3 ♖ac4
 48.♖a7! ♖e6 49.e4 ♖c8 50.♞d7 ♖ec6 51.f4
 ♖8c7 52.f5† ♘h7 53.♖d8 ♖c8 54.♞d3
 ♖e8 55.♞d4 ♖c7 56.♙f4 ♖ce7 57.♖c4
 ♘h6 58.♙f3 ♖d7 59.♙d4 ♘h7 60.b4
 ♖d6 61.♙e3 ♘h6 62.♖c1 ♘h7 63.♙b6
 ♖d7 64.♙c5 ♖ed8 65.♖h1† ♘g8 66.♙f4
 ♖e8 67.♖e1 g5† 68.fxg6 ♘g7 69.g5 ♘xg6
 70.gxf6 ♘xf6 71.♖h1 ♖f7! 72.♙e3 ♙e6
 73.♖h4 ♖f6 74.♖h7 ♖f7 75.♖h5 ♙d7 76.e5
 ♖f1 77.♙e4 ♙c6? 78.♖h6† ♙b5 79.♖b6†
 ♙c4 80.e6 ♖e1† 81.♙f5 ♖f1† 82.♙e5 ♖e1†
 83.♙f6 ♖f1† 84.♙g7 ♖a8 85.e7 ♖e1 86.♙f7
 ♖e4 87.♖d6 ♖h8 88.♖xa6

And Black finally resigned.

1–0

After Carlsen exchanged the queens his long-term superiority started becoming noticeable. The fact that his opponent was left

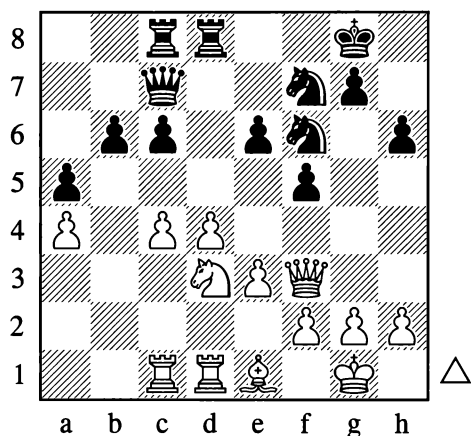
with no counterplay meant a dream scenario of pushing for a win without risking anything. When strong players get such chances, they rarely miss.

However, suppressing the opponent's counterplay is not the only reason why one might go for an exchange of queens when having a long-term advantage. In some cases, especially when a weak structure is involved, the queen might be the only piece that's able to cover the weak pawns and the squares around them. The most famous example of a case like that is probably Smyslov's 26. ♖h4!! from his game against Reshevsky in the FIDE World Championship tournament held in The Hague in 1948. You can find this great game in any database as well as several publications.

Let's check a much more modern example on the same theme:

Magnus Carlsen – Hikaru Nakamura

Shamkir 2014



Nakamura has weakened his structure by playing ...a7-a5 and ...f7-f5. Since the black queen is in charge of defending the weakened area, Carlsen offers an exchange of queens.

25. ♖g3! ♜xg3

After 25... ♖a7 26. f3 Black's queen is out of play and White has managed to restrict the f6-knight and open the e1-h4 diagonal for the e1-bishop. He has a great advantage.

26. hxc3

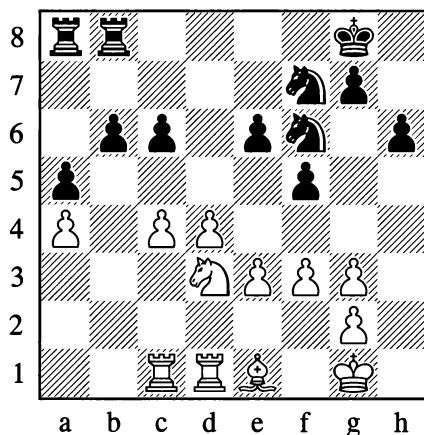
Black must be careful about the threat of c4-c5.

26... ♖a8

To keep the a5-pawn, Black is forced to place his rook in a passive position.

If 26... c5 27. dxc5 bxc5 28. ♕xa5 ♖d6 29. ♕c3 ♖cd8 30. ♖b2, White has an extra pawn for free.

27. f3 ♖db8



Hikaru tries to free himself by playing ...b6-b5. This plan gives White a powerful outpost on c5, but how else was he going to obtain any counterplay?

28. ♖c2

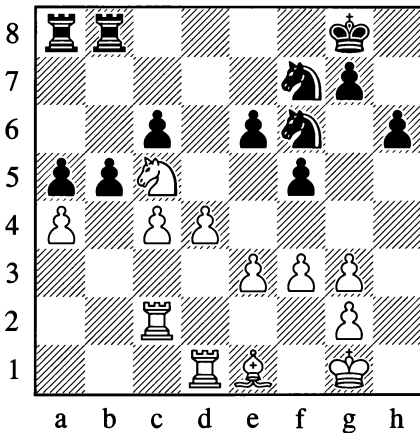
A different, concrete approach with 28. ♖e5! would be better: 28... ♖c8 (After 28... ♖xe5 29. dxe5 ♖e8 30. ♖b1 ♖b7 31. ♖d2 White controls the open d-file and, due to Black's weaknesses on b6, c6, and e6, he obtains a

good advantage.) 29.♖b1 Thanks to Black's easily accessible weaknesses White gains a great advantage.

28...b5 29.♘c5

The most logical. Carlsen tries to keep as many pawns on the board as possible, not helping Black to get rid of his weaknesses.

Swapping the queenside pawns would help Black equalize immediately: 29.cxb5 cxb5 30.axb5 ♖xb5 Black is completely fine, planning to push his a-pawn.



29...bxc4?!

Keeping the tension while improving Black's worst-placed piece with 29...♘d6! was the way to go: 30.cxb5 cxb5 31.♘xe6 bxa4 Black has just enough counterplay to keep the balance.

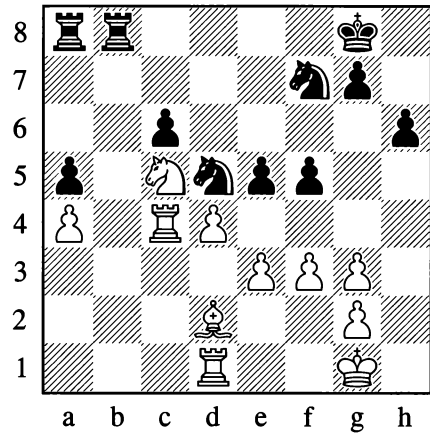
30.♖xc4

The tempting 30.♘xe6? wasn't advisable: 30...♘d5 31.♙f2 ♖e8 32.♘c5 ♘d6 33.♖e1 ♖ab8 Black gets sufficient compensation for the pawn deficit.

30...♘d5

Trying not to lose the e-pawn is not good enough: 30...e5 31.♘e6 ♖b3 32.♖xc6 ♖xe3 33.d5 White's passed d-pawn provides him with an advantage.

31.♙d2 e5



32.e4!?

Carlsen tries to emphasize the more active placement of his pieces by opening the game.

However, it seems that it was better to go for 32.♘e6 and if 32...♖b6, then 33.♖dc1 exd4 34.♖xd4 when the active white pieces combined with Black's weak structure give White a serious advantage.

32...fxe4 33.♘xe4

White has achieved his goals: the black c6- and a5-pawns are good targets for an attack and, because the game is opening, the white bishop seems to be getting stronger. On the other hand, Black has at least managed to exchange some pawns.

33...♘b6?!

The knight was perfectly placed on d5.

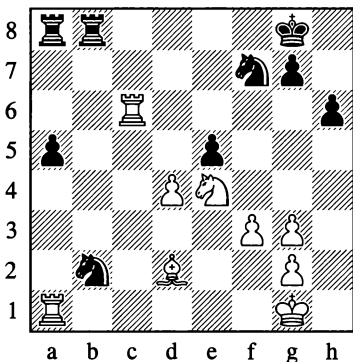
Better was 33...♖b2!, aiming for active counterplay.

34.♖xc6 ♘d8?

The decisive mistake that costs Black the game.

Chances to save the game could have been retained by:

34...♖xa4! 35.♞a1 ♖b2



36.d5

The most principled, keeping additional pawns on the board.

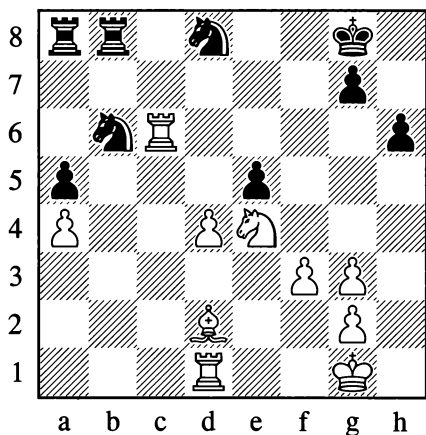
After 36.♙c3 exd4 37.♙xd4 ♖d3 White is still slightly better but Black can continue fighting.

36...a4 37.d6 ♞c8!

In the event of 37...a3 38.d7 ♖d8 39.♞c3, White is better and 39...♙f7 is met with 40.♞c8! when White still has the better chances.

38.♞xc8† ♞xc8 39.♙c3 ♖c4 40.d7 ♞c7 41.♞xa4 ♖b6 42.d8=♙† ♖xd8 43.♞a6 ♖c4 44.♞a8 ♞d7

White has only a slight advantage.

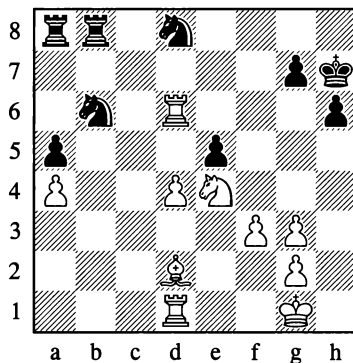


35.♞g6!

Carlsen finds the best square for his rook and increases his advantage. He has threats on both sides of the board, underlining the power of the d2-bishop.

35...♖c4

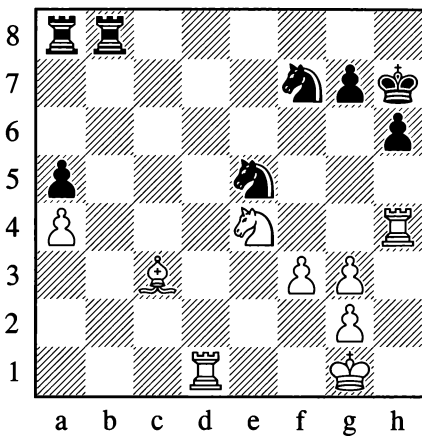
35...♙h7 is the most natural defence, protecting the h6-pawn while gaining a tempo on the g6-rook, but the black king gets further away from the centre. After 36.♞d6 White is completely in control. For example:



36...♖xa4 (36...exd4 37.♙f4 ♖f7 38.♞6xd4 leaves White with an extra pawn and a winning position.) 37.dxe5 White's active pieces and extra pawn give him a decisive advantage.

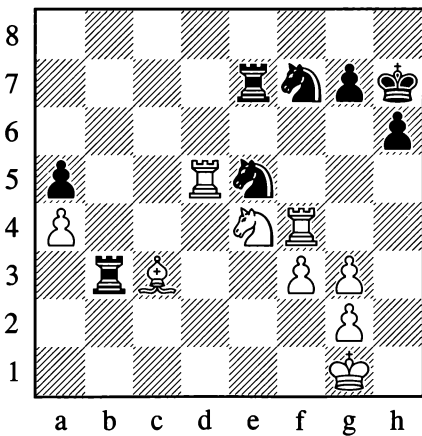
35...exd4 would lose by force to 36.♙f4! when Black can't hold on to the b6-knight: 36...♙b7 (36...♙h7 is the only move, but it transposes to a line examined in the previous note after 37.♞d6 ♖f7 38.♞6xd4.) 37.♖c5 ♙f7 38.♖xb7 ♙xg6 39.♖xd8 ♞xd8 40.♙c7 White wins.

36.dxe5 ♙h7 37.♞g4 ♖xe5 38.♞h4 ♖df7 39.♙c3



White's bishop is using its long-range abilities to create threats on both flanks.

39...Bb3 40...Bd5 Bc8 41...Bf4 Bc7



42...Qxa5

After placing all his pieces on their most active posts, Carlsen finally decides to take the a5-pawn. The position is completely winning.

42...Qg6 43...Bf5 Qfe5 44...Bd1 Qc4 45...Bc1 Qxa5 46...Bxa5

Black has no compensation for the material deficit, and Carlsen easily managed to convert his advantage into a full point.

...1-0

If you look at the starting position, it's clear that Black has created some weaknesses, but it's not at all obvious how White is going to take advantage of them. Every weak pawn or square seems to be adequately defended. With the queens coming off, that changed dramatically. The pawns on a5, b6 and e6 all came under pressure, and Black felt obliged to push ...b6-b5 which weakened the c5-square.

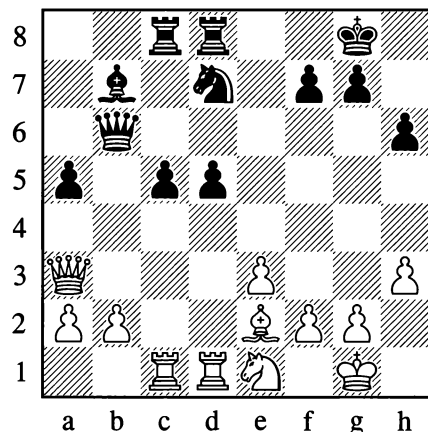
In positions full of weaknesses, it's not uncommon for the queen to play the role of a glue that holds everything together. Without that glue, the house of cards swiftly collapses.

Of course, chess is complicated and in most cases, more than one factor is at play. It's rare to have examples where one single principle is illustrated with absolute clarity. Let's check out the queen exchange that takes place in the game below:

Magnus Carlsen – Kiril Georgiev

Dubai (rapid) 2014

1.d4 Qf6 2.c4 e6 3.Qf3 d5 4.Qc3 Qe7
5.Qg5 h6 6.Qh4 0-0 7.e3 b6 8.Qe2 Qb7
9.Qxf6 Qxf6 10.cxd5 exd5 11.0-0 Qe7
12.Qb3 Bd8 13.Bad1 c5 14.dxc5 Qxc3
15.Qxc3 bxc5 16.Qc1 Qd7 17.Qa3 Qf6
18.Qfd1 Qb6 19.h3 a5 20.Qe1 Qac8



Black has hanging pawns on c5 and d5 and the main question is: are they a weakness or a strength? Since two pairs of minor pieces have already been removed, the dynamic power of this structure has been reduced and White can increase the pressure on them with moves like ♕d3 and ♙f3 .

First things first though: Magnus offers to exchange queens.

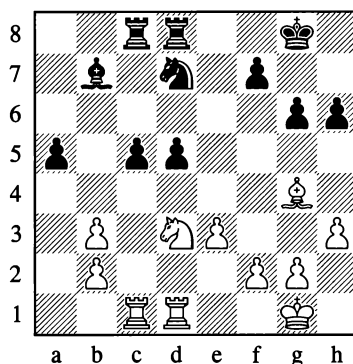
21. ♖xb3!

White continues to simplify the position without worrying about doubling his pawns. The doubled pawns are almost beneficial for White since they stop the black a- and c-pawns from moving forward and the a-file is opened so that a future ♖a1 could target the a5-pawn. Without the queen, it's not so easy for Black to defend that pawn, much like in the previous example.

Even more importantly, with the queens off the board, the attacking potential of the black position becomes non-existent. To top it all off, White has the better structure, so a transition to an endgame should be favourable. All types of reasoning we have studied so far supporting a queen exchange are present in this example at once!

21... ♖xb3

Trying to exchange queens on Black's own terms with $21... \text{♖b4}$ can be met with: $22. \text{♙g4!}$ (But not $22. \text{♕d3}$ due to $22... \text{♖xb3}$ $23. \text{axb3}$ c4 and Black is fine.) $22... \text{g6}$ $23. \text{♕d3}$ ♖xb3 $24. \text{axb3}$

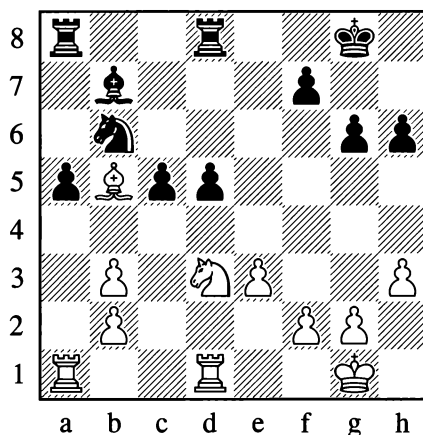


$24... \text{f5}$ Accepting even more weaknesses. (After $24... \text{c4}$ $25. \text{♕f4}$ White's pieces are placed in their optimal positions and Black's weaknesses come under heavy pressure.) $25. \text{♙f3}$ White is clearly better.

22. axb3 g6

Black wants to be able to meet ♙g4 with $... \text{f7-f5}$.

23. ♙f3 ♕b6 24. ♖a1 ♖a8 25. ♕d3



By successive attacks on Black's weak pawns, Carlsen does not allow his opponent any time to coordinate his forces.

25... ♖dc8 26. ♕e5?!

This move is dubious, as it moves the white knight away from the black weak pawns and doing so gives Black some chances to create counterplay.

After the most natural 26.♘f4 White keeps his slight advantage.

26...♙g7 27.♞a3 ♜f6

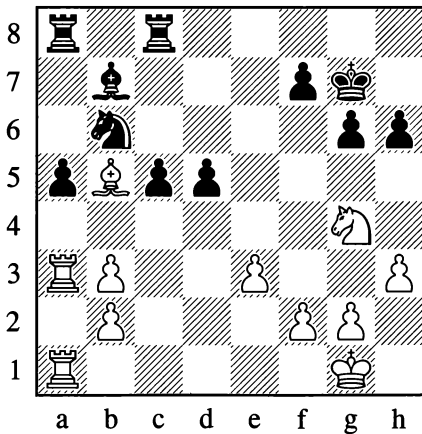
Black starts activating his pieces and White needs to make a choice concerning his hanging knight.

28.♘g4†

28.♘c4!? is flashy but nothing special. After 28...♘xc4 29.bxc4 ♞d8 Black equalizes.

After 28.♘d3 ♜e7 29.♞c1 ♜d6 Black manages to protect the pawns with his centralized king.

28...♙g7 29.♞da1



29...c4!

Finally, Black manages to free himself.

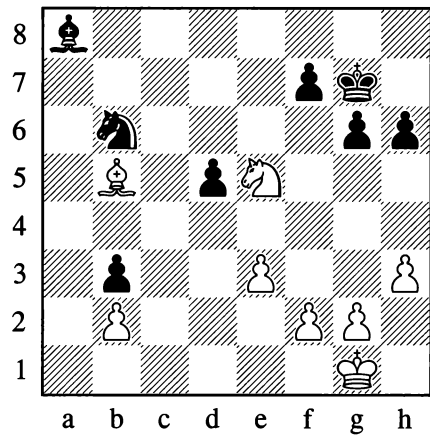
30.♞xa5

In the event of 30.bxc4 dxc4 31.♞xa5 ♞xa5 32.♞xa5 ♞c5 33.♞a7 ♙xg2 34.♜xg2 ♞xb5 White achieves nothing.

30...cxb3

Better was: 30...♞xa5 31.♞xa5 cxb3 32.♞a7 ♞c1† 33.♜h2 ♙c8 34.♘e5 ♙e6 Black's active rook gives him excellent counter-chances.

31.♞xa8 ♞xa8 32.♞xa8 ♙xa8 33.♘e5



33...♙f6:

Black enters a bad endgame, having miscalculated – probably due to the game being played under a rapid time control.

With more time, Georgiev would have almost certainly chosen 33...f6 34.♘d3 ♜f7, with reasonable drawing chances.

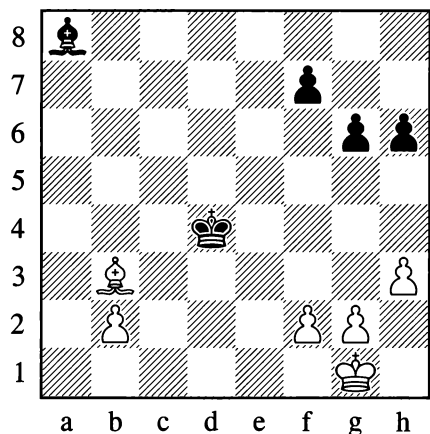
34.♘d7†!

Simple chess! By exchanging the knights White goes for the duel between his good bishop and its passive counterpart.

34...♘xd7 35.♙xd7 ♜e5 36.♙a4

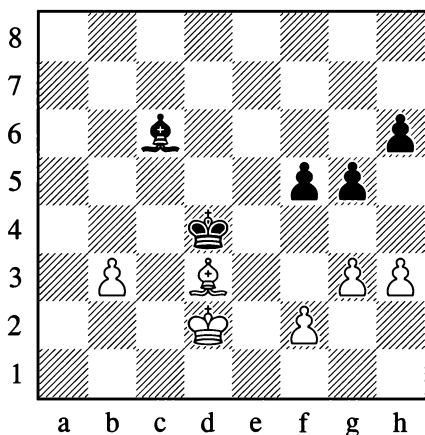
The b3-pawn falls.

36...d4 37.exd4† ♜xd4 38.♙xb3



White has a healthy extra pawn, but Black's extremely active king must be enough for this position to objectively be a draw. In practical terms though, it's always not easy to defend a position where your opponent is playing for two results. Especially if that opponent is Magnus Carlsen!

38...f6 39.♔f1 g5 40.♙e6 ♙c6 41.g3 ♔d3
42.♔e1 ♔c2 43.b3 ♔d3 44.♙c4† ♔d4
45.♔d2 f5 46.♙d3



46...♙d7?

46...f4! was still a draw.

47.b4?

47.f4! fixes a new weakness on f5, giving White a winning position.

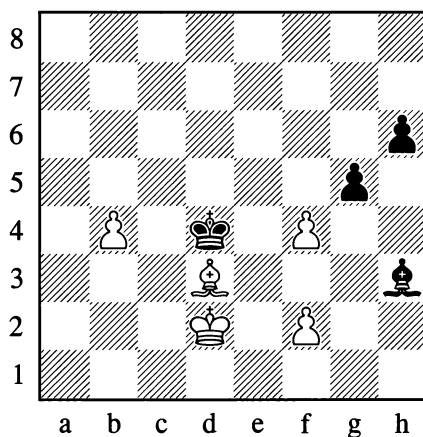
47...f4!

It's objectively a draw again!

48.gxf4 ♙xh3?

After this mistake, Black never gets another chance.

48...gxf4 was the way to go.

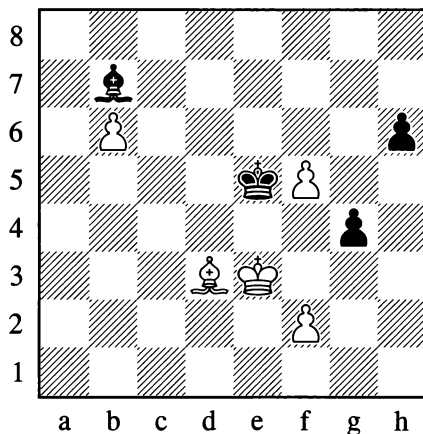


49.f5!

White's two passers are too far apart for Black to be able to control them.

Of course, not 49.fxg5 hxg5 which is an easy draw for Black. Every pawn exchange helps the side with the material deficit!

49...♔e5 50.b5 ♙g2 51.b6 ♙b7 52.♔e3 g4



53.♙e4!

Carlsen puts an end to the black resistance with this cute tactical trick.

53...♙c8

If 53...♙xe4, then 54.f6! and White wins.

54.f6 ♖xf6 55.♔f4 h5 56.b7 ♕xb7 57.♕xb7
♕g6 58.♕c6

Black resigned.

1–0

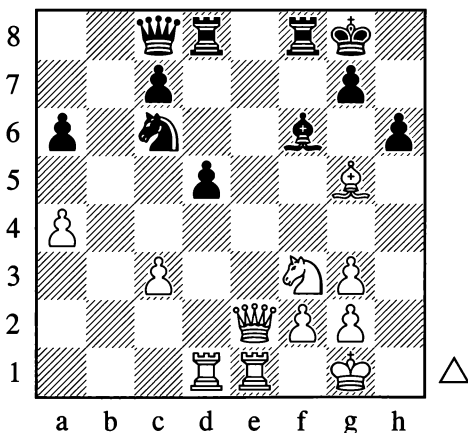
This is a rare occurrence where an experienced player should have no problem finding the key move with 21.♖b3!. Every principle we have talked about pointed in that direction.

With the queens off the board, Carlsen was able to start piling up pressure against the opponent's structure without being afraid of any counterplay, while forcing Black to defend those pawns passively with his pieces. Even if at some point he went slightly astray because of the time control, Black's task was always unenviable.

Let's check a final, more complicated example, on the same topic.

Magnus Carlsen – Michal Krasenkow

Sanxenxo 2004



24.♖e6†!?

An interesting intermediate check. Because of Black's poor pawn structure, Carlsen is looking forward to trying his chances in the endgame.

However, it must be said that on the other end of our arguments, White's king looks safer than his black counterpart. With the two principles colliding, the decision becomes a matter of calculation and, partly, a matter of taste. Both strategies make sense. You should either go for an endgame or try to attack the black king as quickly as possible.

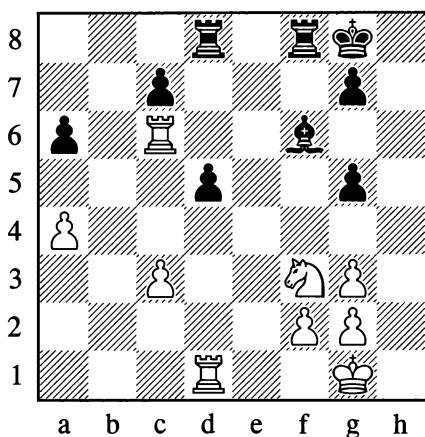
In this particular case, the continuation 24.♕xf6! ♖xf6 25.♖h4! is favoured by the engine. The white ideas include g3-g4 and ♖f5, f2-f4 and ♖f3, or ♖d3 and ♖g6. Nevertheless, from a human point of view, it's not clear that the attack is as dangerous as the engine claims it is.

In another case, it could be the other way round. Going for the attack could make our advantage evaporate, and the queen exchange could be our best bet. When two principles like these collide, there is no way to avoid calculating concrete lines. Without them, it's impossible to make an informed decision.

24...♖xe6 25.♖xe6 hxc5

25...♖b8 is just about better than it looks. The b8-knight protects the a6-pawn and prevents the white rook from reaching the c6-square. Nonetheless, it is terribly passive. After 26.♕xf6 ♖xf6 27.♖xf6 gxf6 28.♖d4 Black's structure is nothing but weaknesses and his pieces aren't exactly active either. White keeps a good objective and practical advantage.

26.♖xc6



White is slightly better due to his superb rook on c6. This kind of square was made available to the rook by removing the black queen and knight from the board. Otherwise, there was no chance it could be stably situated so deep inside the black camp.

26...Rde8 27.Rxc7

Relinquishing the advantage.

As Krasenkov mentioned in his analysis, it was better for White to play: 27.g4! Rxe4 28.Rxd5 (28.Rxa6 is not good enough. After 28...Rxe4 29.Rxd5 Rxc4 Black holds the draw.) 28...Rxa4 29.c4! White retains decent winning chances.

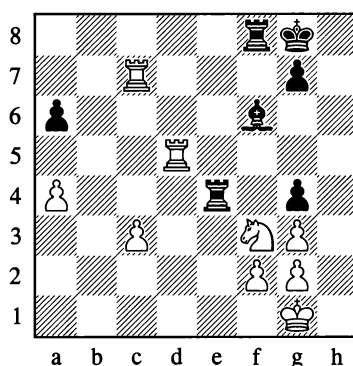
27...Re4!

Black seizes the opportunity and activates his rook by attacking the a4-pawn.

28.a5

Another option was:

28.Rxd5 g4!

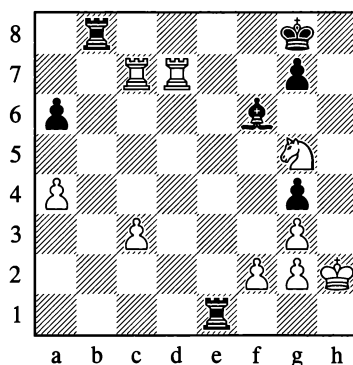


29.Rg5

This is forced. White needs to have some checkmate threats of his own.

After 29.Rd4?? White would surprisingly find himself on the back foot: 29...Re1† 30.Qh2 Rb8 If Black gets both rooks on the first rank, it's checkmate. White enters panic mode: 31.Qc2 Rxc1 32.Qb4 a5 33.Qd3 Rf1 34.Rb5 Rd8 The penetration of the second black rook is unavoidable. 35.Qb2 Rd2 Coming up is ...Rxf2 ending the game on the spot.

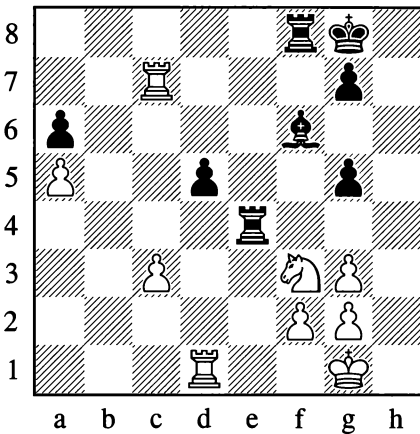
29...Re1† 30.Qh2 Rb8 31.Rdd7



Black can't checkmate White on the first rank this time round; his own king is too weak. The threat of checkmate is good enough to grant him a draw though:

31...Qxg5 32.Rxg7† Qf8 33.Rcf7† Qe8 34.Ra7 Qf8 35.Raf7†

White has no choice but to repeat moves.



28...g4 29.♘d4 ♙xd4 30.♗xd4 ♖e1†
31.♕h2 ♗xf2

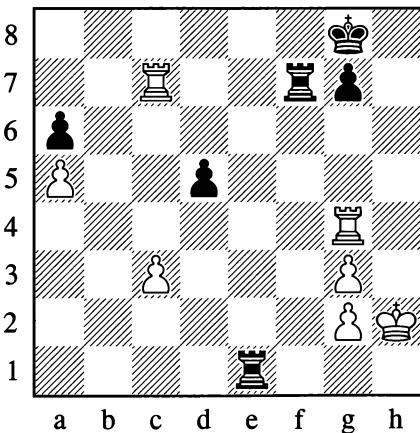
Everything gets scooped out.

31...♗e4 would also be enough for a draw.

32.♗xg4

Of course, not 32.♗xd5?? due to 32...♗ff1 and the white king gets checkmated.

32...♗f7



The game is completely equal.

33.♗c8† ♗f8 34.♗xf8† ♕xf8 35.♗g6 ♗c1
36.♗xa6 ♗xc3 37.♗d6

½–½

It was a tough decision for White on his 24th move. With the principles colliding, the young future World Champion decided to go for the endgame. As his experienced opponent mentions in his annotations, had Carlsen found 27.g4! he could press on with decent winning chances in the endgame.

The ruthless engines criticizing 24.♗e6†!? don't tell the full story. Declining a safe advantage in the endgame in favour of a double-edged fight with queens on the board is not an easy choice. When faced with this type of dilemma, there is no golden recipe. Both choices (24.♗e6†!? and 24.♙xf6!) had pluses and minuses according to our principles. In such cases, calculation is our friend. Our subjective taste should only enter the frame if calculation can't give a proper answer to the problem.

Denying a Queen Trade

We've already seen several examples in the previous chapter where one side denied an exchange of queens because of their attacking potential against the opponent's king. Let's see another example of a queen-trade denial but this time through the lens of what we learnt in the previous examples.

Magnus Carlsen – Arkadij Naiditsch

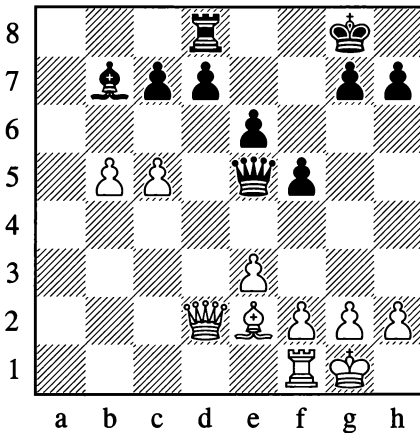
Baden-Baden (rapid) 2015

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♙b4† 4.♘bd2 b6
5.a3 ♙xd2† 6.♗xd2 0–0 7.e3 ♙b7 8.b4 a5
9.♙b2 axb4 10.axb4 ♘e4 11.♗c2 ♗xa1†
12.♙xa1 ♗e7 13.c5 f5 14.♙e2 ♘c6 15.♙c3
bxc5 16.dxc5 ♗a8 17.0–0 ♘xc3 18.♗xc3
♗f6

20...♖e5?

In this version, trading off the knights makes White's task much simpler.

More stubborn resistance would be offered by 20...♖e7 21.c6 ♜c8.

21.♖xe5 ♜xe5**22.c6!**

That's the huge difference when comparing 19...♖e5!, with 20...♖e5?. The d7-pawn was actually better off hanging than being protected, as now the pin gives White the chance to inflict much greater damage than the loss of a pawn.

22...♜c8

By comparing this position with the initial one, we immediately understand that Carlsen was right in his earlier choice to refrain from the exchange of queens.

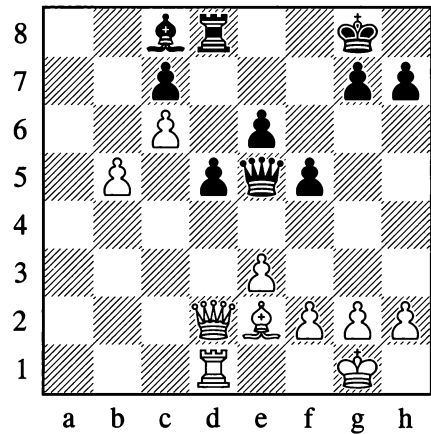
Apart from every other concrete justification we could mention, the presence of queens denies Black the possibility of safely approaching the d-file with his king, making his defensive task much harder than it would be without the queens on the board. Then the king would be safe to march to e7, solving all of Black's problems.

You didn't need to calculate this far to

predict this. We already mentioned it on the note before White's 19th move. If the queens got exchanged, Black would be quick to centralize his king. Now that the queens are on the board, he's unable to do so.

23.♞d1 d5

As explained, 23...♖f7 is not going to work: 24.h3 ♖e7 25.♜b4+ d6 26.b6 cxb6 27.♜xb6 Black's king is terribly exposed.

**24.♜d4!**

Now that Black released the tension, it is time to trade off the queens. Black's pieces are completely passive, and his central pawns have been placed on squares of the same colour as his bishop.

24...♜xd4

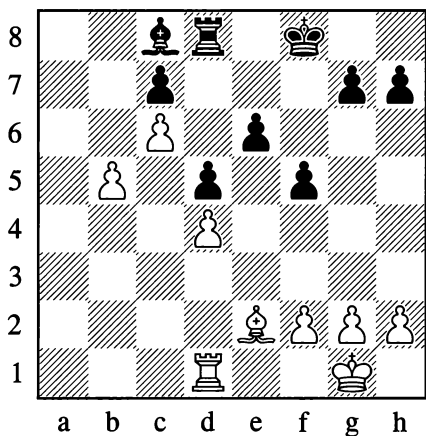
Black couldn't really deny the exchange: 24...♜d4 25.f4 ♞e8 26.♞a1 ♜f8 27.♞a7 ♞e7 28.♜e5 The white queen reigns supreme on e5 and Black is helpless against White's various threats like ♞a8 followed by b5-b6.

25.exd4

The point. The c8-bishop is paralyzed and White is completely winning.

Of course, not 25.♞xd4?? due to 25...♖f7 26.f4 ♖e7 and White's advantage would evaporate when Black gets to play ...e6-e5.

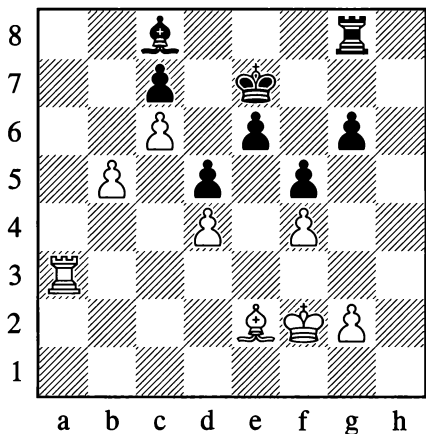
25...♔f8



26.f4!

Stopping ...e6-e5 once and for all.

26...♔e7 27.♖a1 g6 28.♔f2 ♔d6 29.♖a3
♗f8 30.h4 ♔e7 31.h5! ♖g8 32.hxg6 hxg6



33.♖h3!

The white rook leaves the a-file to penetrate the opponent's camp from the other side.

33...g5 34.fxg5 ♔d6

After 34...♖xg5 35.♖h8 the black bishop is trapped.

35.♖h6 ♔e7 36.♕f3 e5 37.♖h7 ♔d6

38.dxe5 ♔c5 39.♖xc7 ♔xb5 40.♕xd5

In a hopeless position, Black decided to call it a day.

1-0

Most likely, when Carlsen decided to keep the queens on the board, he wasn't thinking so much about the relative safety of the two kings. Nevertheless, Black's long-term superiority probably made it an obvious decision for a player of his calibre. White's chances lay within the dynamic potential of his position and his ability to create concrete problems.

Black's mistake with his 19th move is also highly instructive, allowing us to repeat a massively important principle. In cases when we are under pressure and our opponent has the initiative, we may have exactly one chance to force our way out of trouble. Missing it could make us both suffer for a prolonged period of time, and/or lose a game we could have saved. We should always look for our chance to lash out!

Pawn Majority

In this chapter, we've already seen plenty of examples with one side having the superior structure. In almost all these cases, the better structure was defined by the smaller number of pawn islands.

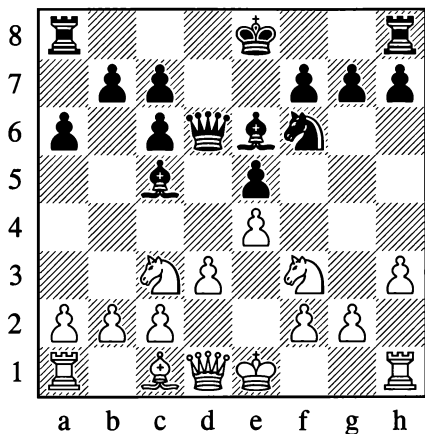
However, pawn islands only refer to the solidity of a structure, and solidity is not the only determining factor of a structure's quality. The other hugely important factor, especially in endgames, is mobility.

In endgames, pawns must be pushed both to gain space and, more importantly, to become queens. The most common example of having the advantage of a more mobile structure is when one player has a pawn majority, while the other doesn't.

Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

Wijk aan Zee 2019

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 ♙c5 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.d3 ♖d6 8.h3 ♙e6



9.♙e3!

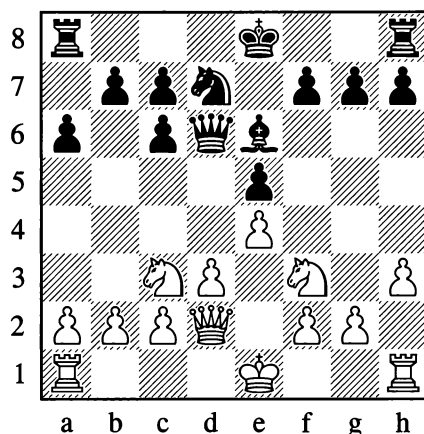
An instructive moment. At first glance, it seems like Carlsen's only goal when offering the exchange of dark-squared bishops is to get rid of the opponent's two-bishop advantage. In fact, he has a much deeper plan.

When the opponent has doubled c-pawns, a traditional method for gaining a lasting advantage is to try to exchange the d-pawn for the opponent's e-pawn. With the implementation of this plan, White will seize a powerful kingside majority, while Black's queenside majority is less mobile due to the doubled c-pawns.

9...♘d7

After 9...♙xe3 10.fxe3 the f-file opens in White's favour. The f1-rook will make great use of it after White castles short.

10.♙xc5 ♘xc5 11.♖d2 ♘d7



12.d4!

White manages to get in his desired pawn break before Black has time to play ...c6-c5.

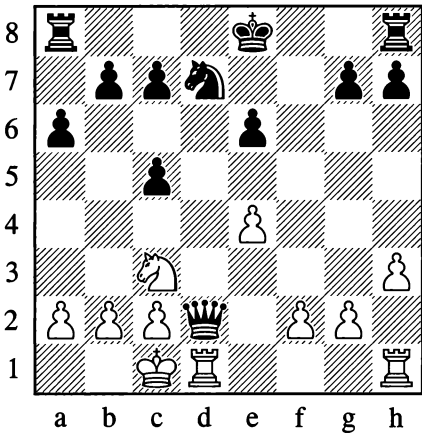
12...exd4 13.♘xd4

Carlsen has achieved his goal. Black's pair of bishops has been neutralized and he has a pawn majority on the kingside. Black's pawn majority on the queenside is less mobile and in an endgame that majority is unable to create a passed pawn.

13...c5?!

Black needs to at least have some development to show for his worse structure. A better choice was: 13...0-0-0 14.0-0-0 ♜he8 White still has the easier game, but Black should objectively be able to hold his own with accurate play.

14.♘xe6 fxe6 15.0-0-0 ♖xd2†



16.♠xd2!

The king is more active in the centre. There was no reason to take with the rook.

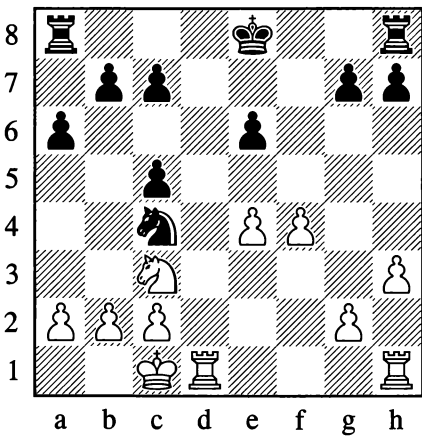
16...♘e5

Anand prevents White from placing his king on the desired e3-square. Nevertheless, the knight is a target on e5.

17.f4!

Setting the majority in motion.

17...♘c4† 18.♠c1



White is better due to his healthier pawn structure. Moreover, the position is completely one-sided. Black has nothing better to do than

sit and wait as White tries to slowly push his kingside majority. If Black was to start pushing his own majority, there is a good chance that would create weaknesses White could exploit. In any case, no matter how far the black pawns go, they will never be able to create a passed pawn.

Carlsen eventually managed to get the full point after a long struggle.

...1-0

In cases where we have the more mobile pawn majority, exchanges tend to favour us. The best we could get is a pawn endgame; it would always be winning. The fewer pieces we have on the board, the greater the power of the pawns becomes. That's why Carlsen exchanged so many pieces without a moment's hesitation. If he could magically make it happen, he would also exchange all rooks and knights.

When you have a more mobile pawn structure, you should remember three things: exchange, exchange, exchange!

The Powerful Queen and Knight duo

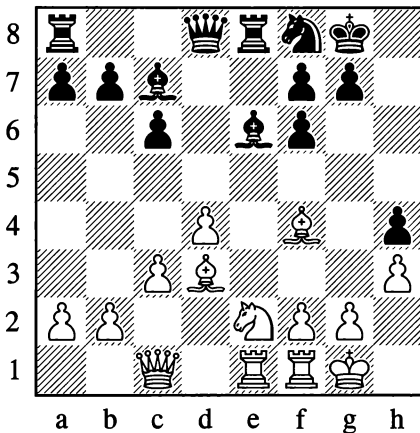
Classical wisdom dictates that a queen works much better with a knight compared to how she works with a bishop. This is especially true when conducting an attack, but that's not the topic of this chapter.

The other case when the queen and knight can show their true potential to work as a team is when the opposing side has weaknesses in their structure. By the way, note how in the game below White is the one having the mobile pawn majority, but with a board full of pieces the majority is rendered irrelevant.

Luka Draskovic – Pouya Idani

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022

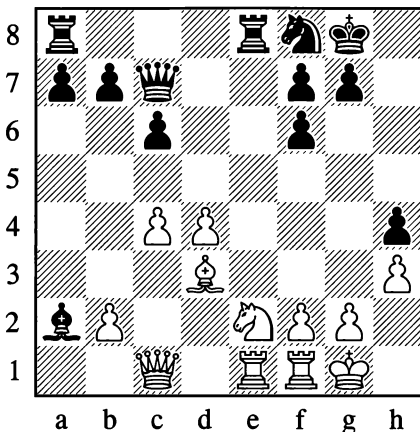
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♗f6
 5.♗xf6† exf6 6.c3 ♔d6 7.♙d3 0-0 8.♖c2
 ♜e8† 9.♗e2 h5 10.0-0 h4 11.h3 ♗d7
 12.♙d2 ♗f8 13.♞ae1 ♙c7 14.♖c1 ♙e6
 15.♙f4



15...♙xa2!

A move that shows Pouya's excellent understanding of the position. Believe it or not, this move is a prelude to a series of exchanges that lead the game by force to a favourable position for Black, where he gets to play with queen and knight against queen and bishop.

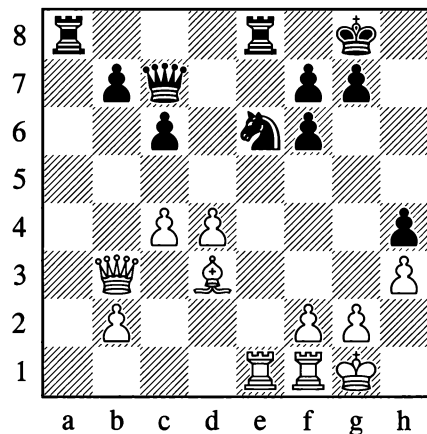
16.♙xc7 ♖xc7 17.c4



17...a5!

Before capturing the pawn on a2, Pouya had calculated that his bishop would not get trapped. By provoking the opponent to play c3-c4 White's d4-pawn will be weakened. Black will have a pleasant position by pressuring the newly created weakness on d4. A typical strategy in the Caro-Kann Defence!

18.♖c3 a4 19.♗c1 ♙b3 20.♗xb3 axb3
 21.♖xb3 ♗e6



This is the position that Black intended to reach when he played 15...♙xa2. Black's knight is ready to wreak havoc on the weak dark squares in White's camp.

22.♖c3

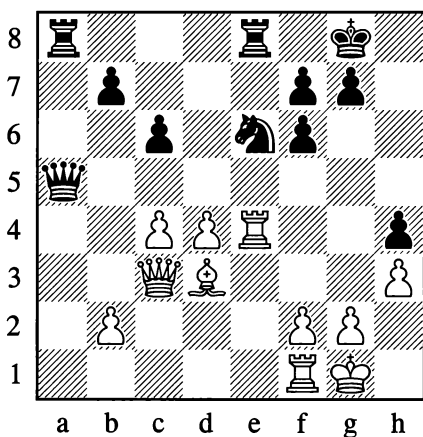
After 22.d5 ♗f4 23.♞xe8† ♞xe8 24.♞d1 cxd5 25.cxd5 ♞d8 26.♙e4 g5 objectively the position remains roughly equal but, due to his monster knight, Black's play is easier.

22...♖a5

A logical move. The white queen is the only defender of the weak dark squares.

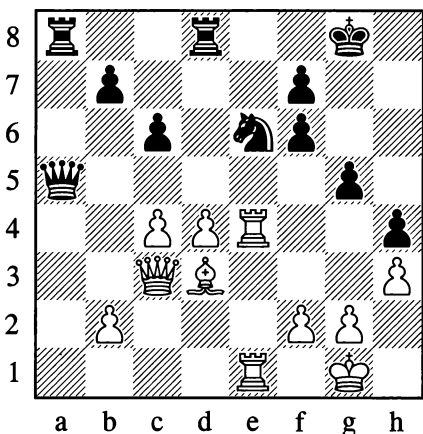
Also logical was 22...♞ed8 23.♞e4 g5 24.♞fe1 ♖a5 25.b4 ♖a3 and Black keeps an edge.

23.♞e4

**23...g5**

It might seem risky for Black to play like that, but the move itself is very logical. Black is simply protecting his h4-pawn while creating an outpost for his knight on f4. His king is not in any danger. He can exchange queens whenever he wants; but even if that wasn't the case, it is not easy to see a way for White to attack Black's kingside construction.

Black could have also gone for the endgame with 23...♖xc3 24.bxc3 when a logical continuation would be: 24...f5 25.♞e3 g6 26.♞b1 ♔f8! 27.♞xb7 ♞a3 28.♙f1 f4 29.♞e4 ♚d8 30.♞xe8† ♔xe8 31.♞b1 ♞xc3 The endgame should be a draw, but Black still has practical chances for more.

24.♞fe1 ♞ed8**25.♙f1?!**

Wasting time.

After 25.b4 ♖a3 26.♖xa3 ♞xa3 27.d5! cxd5 28.cxd5 ♚f4 29.♙c4 White is objectively holding the balance. Still, it is clearly easier to make moves with the black pieces.

25...♔g7 26.♞b1 ♞d7

Black has achieved a comfortable position and he has plenty of ideas to increase the pressure. He could take on c3; or he could retreat with ...♖a7, preparing ...♞ad8; or he could even go all the way back with ...♖d8, leaving his a8-rook active on the open a-file. He eventually won the game on move 51.

...0-1

Throughout the course of this game, the white light-squared bishop looked utterly useless. It couldn't cooperate with the queen to create any threats. In contrast, the black knight combined with the queen exerted serious pressure on the white structure, forcing White to resort to passive defence.

The weakness of the d4-pawn was what gave the queen and knight duo most of their attacking power (the h4-pawn creating an "outpost" on f4 also helped). If the white c-pawn could have returned to c3 then White would not have had any problems.

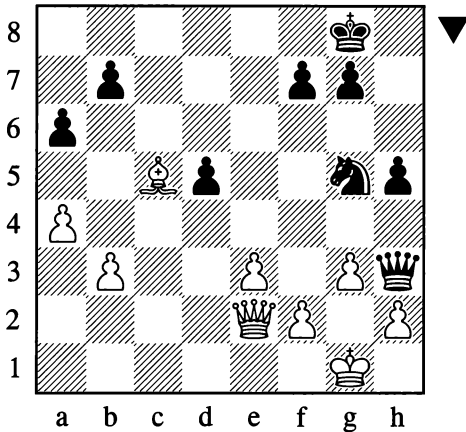
Transforming an Advantage

The topic of transforming one advantage into another is huge and could easily be the topic of a single book. Here, we'll only attempt to briefly touch on it.

What we learnt about the pair of bishops holds true to all permanent advantages: we shouldn't hoard them! Sometimes, it's best to let go. Let's see an example where Carlsen shows his willingness to relinquish one type of advantage to gain something else.

Ilya Dudukin – Magnus Carlsen

Internet (rapid) 2018



28... ♖g4!?

An interesting idea. The exchange of queens leads to an advantage for Black since the light squares in White's camp are weak and Black's king and knight can use them to attack the white pawns.

Carlsen essentially chooses to trade his advantage of being able to use the queen-knight duo to threaten the white king, in favour of an endgame in which Black has advantages in space, king activity and light-squared domination.

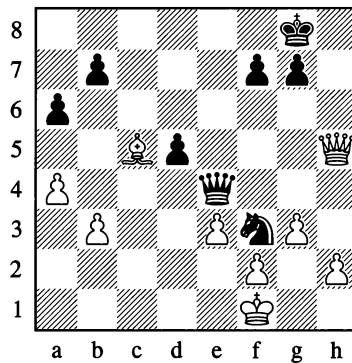
29. ♖xg4

White accepts the invitation to the endgame.

Refusing the exchange of queens would not help:

29. ♖f1 ♖e4! 30. ♖xh5 ♘f3

Black's notoriously powerful queen-and-knight attacking duo starts to create unpleasant threats against the white king.



The lines in such positions, where one side is conducting a king hunt, can be very long and hard to calculate because of the number of quiet moves needed. Even though we sometimes need to use it, we should not rely only on our intuition. One dubious check and the attack could evaporate! We will split into two variations:

a) 31.b4

This move, for example, loses by force, but the line is far from easy:

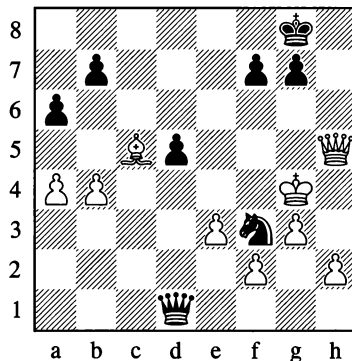
31... ♖b1† 32. ♖g2 ♖g1†!

A deeply unpleasant check!

33. ♖h3

33. ♖xf3 ♖d1† picks up the queen.

33... ♖f1† 34. ♖g4 ♖d1!



35. ♖f4

35. ♖h3 g6 36. ♖h6 ♖f1† 37. ♖g4 ♖e5† 38. ♖f4 ♖d3† 39. ♖g5 ♖xc5 40. bxc5 ♖xf2 and White's position is hopeless.

35...g5† 36.♔f5 ♖g7!!

The only winning move, controlling the f6-square, and thus threatening a devastating check on the b1-h7 diagonal.

37.♙f8†

After a quiet move like 37.a5, White would be checkmated in three moves: 37...♗b1†

38.♔g4 ♗e4† 39.♔h3 ♘g1#

37...♔xf8 38.♗h8† ♔e7 39.♗f6† ♔e8

The checks run out, and Black wins.

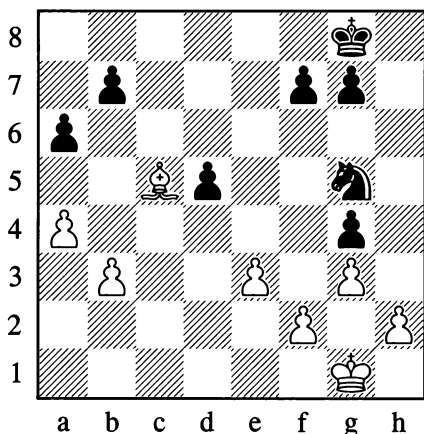
b) 31.♔g2!!

The only move, walking into a double check! Black was threatening a devastating check on b1, and it had to be stopped.

31...♘d2† 32.♔h3 ♘xb3 33.♙a7 b5 34.axb5 axb5

Despite material parity, Black has a pleasant advantage due to his passed b-pawn and the coordination between his queen and knight.

29...hxcg4



Let's see how Carlsen builds on his positional advantages in the new situation.

30.♙b4 ♔h7

The start of the black king march.

31.h4

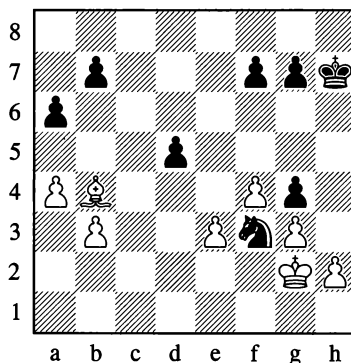
The white king was tied to the defence of the weak h2-pawn, so this move had to be played sooner rather than later.

Another option was:

31.f4 ♘f3†

31...gxf3 looks good at first but leads nowhere after the simple 32.♔f2 ♔g6 33.h4 ♘e4† 34.♔xf3 and White is perfectly fine.

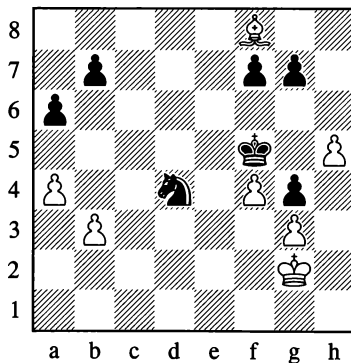
32.♔g2



Black's strongest move is:

32...d4!

32...♔g6 is less accurate, due to: 33.h4! ♔f5 34.h5! The only move. White gains counterplay against the g7-pawn. 34...d4 35.exd4 ♘xd4 36.♙f8



36...♖xb3 (36...♖e6 allows the typical 37.♙xg7! and White is out of any danger: 37...♖xg7 38.h6 ♗g6 39.hxg7 ♗xg7 40.♗f2 With a draw.) 37.♙xg7 White is objectively not worse in this complicated endgame.

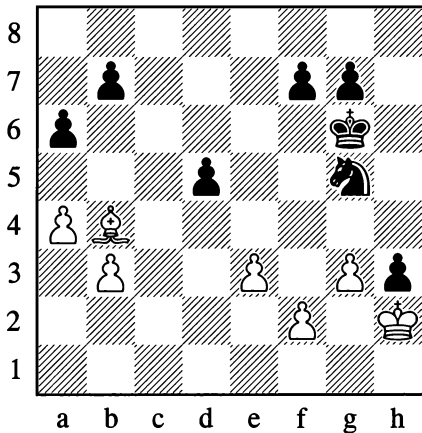
33.e4

After 33.exd4 ♖xd4 the b3-pawn falls.

33...d3 34.♗f2 ♖d4 35.♙c3 ♖c2!

Black creates a barrier the white king cannot cross, and has good practical chances in the ensuing endgame.

31...gxf3 32.♗h2 ♗g6



33.f4?

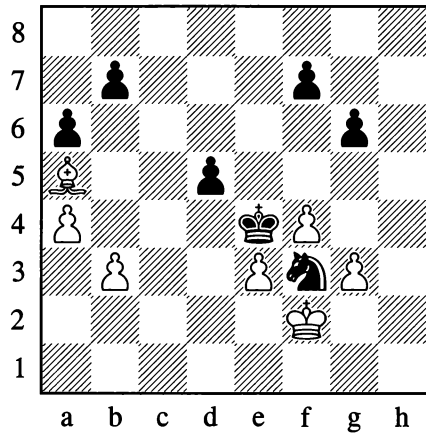
The decisive mistake.

White's last chance to resist was to deny the black king the f5-square with 33.g4!, but after 33...f5 Black retains good chances to win.

33...♖f3† 34.♗xh3 ♗f5 35.♗g2 ♗e4

Black's king enters the vital e4-square, guaranteeing a winning advantage.

36.♗f2 g6 37.♙a5



37...d4!

The final breakthrough. The black knight and king get free roam inside the white camp.

38.♙b6

After 38.exd4 ♖xd4 39.b4 ♖c6 White is helpless.

38...d3

The advanced passed pawn decides the game.

39.♙a5 ♖h2 40.♙b6 ♖g4† 41.♗e1 ♖xe3 42.♗f2 d2

The pawn queens. A highly instructive endgame.

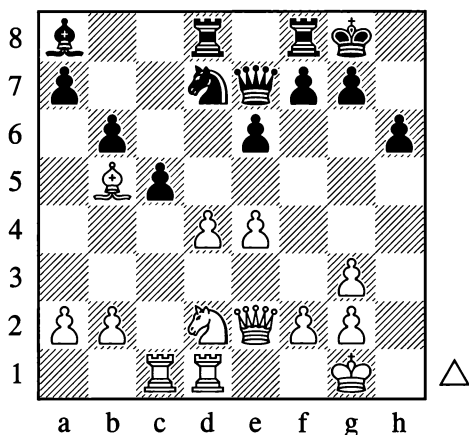
0-1

Despite having a powerful attacking duo of queen and knight, Carlsen did not hesitate to exchange his queen to force a promising endgame. The exchange of queens in this example was once again justified by the excess of weaknesses in White's camp. In that regard, Carlsen's decision to go for the trade reminds us of his decision in the game against Krasenkov. It was the same kind of dilemma, and he made the same type of choice.

In the next example, the long-term advantage of a better structure will tactically be transformed into having the more active pieces and, later, into an extra pawn.

Magnus Carlsen – Zbynek Hracek

Germany 2007



20. ♖xd7!

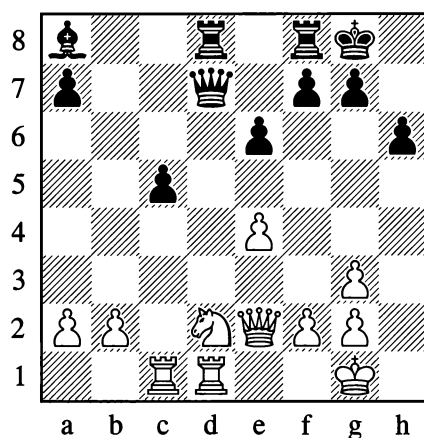
In a balanced position, Carlsen trades off his good bishop for the d7-knight, trying to damage his opponent's pawn structure. When considering any trade, you should evaluate all the positional and tactical factors carefully. What you are trying to achieve might be positionally desirable, but changing the nature of the game can always have some concrete implications.

20... ♜xd7!?

Black tries to solve his problems by using tactical means.

20... ♜xd7 was the normal way but, understandably, Black wanted to avoid playing like this. After 21. dxc5 bxc5 22. ♜c2 ♜d4 23. ♜dc1 White has a slight but lasting positional advantage due to the weak c5-pawn. The e4-pawn restricting the black bishop is also important to our evaluation.

21. dxc5 bxc5

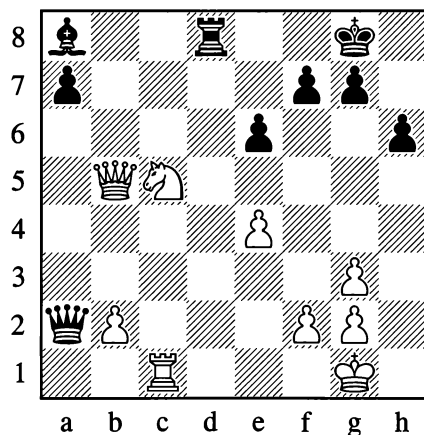


22. ♖b3

Black was threatening to continue with ... ♜d3 so White had to do something fast.

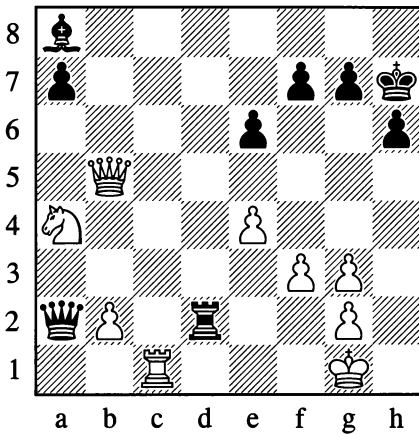
Trying to go positional instead of taking the pawn with 22. ♖c4 would be met with 22... ♜c7, planning ... ♜d4. White has difficulties protecting his e4-pawn with f2-f3 because the g3-pawn is hanging.

22... ♜a4 23. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 24. ♖xc5 ♜xa2
25. ♜b5



Hracek avoided having an extra weakness and kept material balance, but his queen and bishop are out of action. The advantage of a better structure has successfully been transformed into greater piece activity.

25...♔h7 26.f3 ♖d2 27.♘a4



27...♖d4?!

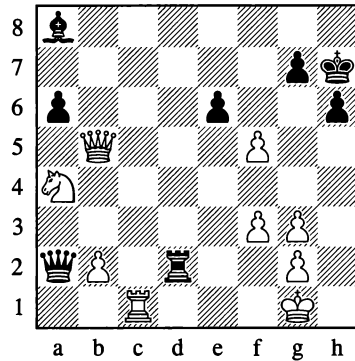
Not the most precise. Black should not have relieved the pressure on the white b2-pawn.

The surprising 27...♖b7!? was good enough to ensure equality, planning ...♖c8-d7. The bishop will not be hanging on c8, as if the c1-rook leaves its position Black doubles on the first rank, and the doubled white g-pawns ensure that the king gets mated. Combining the patient approach of improving the bishop with the tactical justification of placing it en prise is tough for a human to find, but it looks entirely logical after being recommended by the engine. After all, the a8-bishop was Black's worst piece.

There was a more human way of trying to activate the same bishop, leading to complications:

27...f5!? 28.exf5 a6!

Asking the white queen to lose connection with either the a4-knight or the f5-pawn.



29.♗b4

The most logical, threatening the d2-rook.

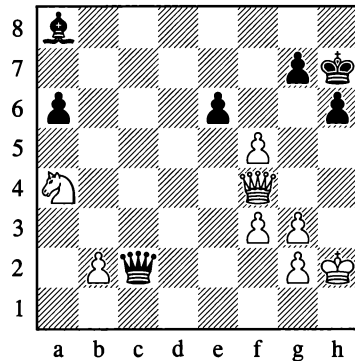
29.♗c4 ♗xc4 30.♖xc4 exf5 is equal.

After 29.♗b8 ♖xf3! Black seizes the initiative.

29...♖c2!

This trick gets Black completely out of trouble.

30.♖xc2 ♗b1† 31.♔h2 ♗xc2 32.♗f4



32...e5!

Another deflection tactic.

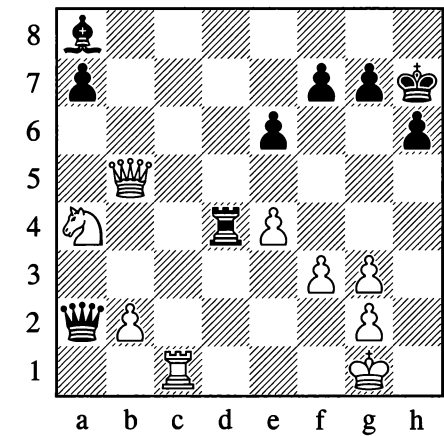
33.♗g4 ♖xf3! 34.♗xf3 ♗xa4

After Black used the hanging nature of the a4-knight so many times in this line, trying to overload the white queen, he finally gets to capture the poor beast.

35.f6 gxf6 36.♗xf6 ♗d4 37.♗xa6 ♗xb2

With a draw.

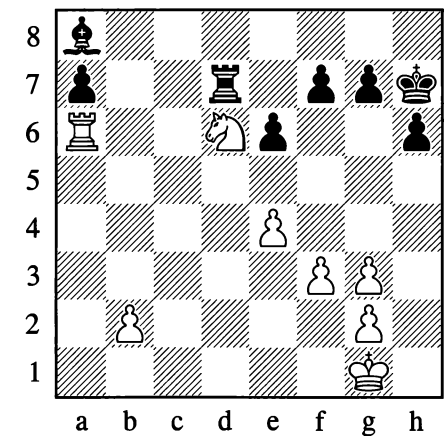
As it so often happens, Black had a couple of concrete solutions giving him complete equality. Having failed to spot the necessary tactical resources, he makes some small concessions and it's all downhill from there.



28. Qc3!

Carlsen suddenly forces the exchange of queens and enters a better endgame. Another transformation!

28... Qxc4 29. Qxc4 Rxc4 30. Ra1 Rxc7 31. Qb5 Rb7 32. Qd6 Rd7 33. Ra6



33... Qb7?!

Black seeks his drawing chances in a pawn-down rook endgame.

A solid move like 33... Rxc7 would be better, but the days Black could force his way to a draw are over. Now he must patiently defend for a long time and that's not anyone's cup of tea.

34. Rxa7 Rxd6 35. Rxb7 Rd1+ 36. Qf2 Rd2+ 37. Qf1

From a theoretical point of view, this endgame should be a draw. Nevertheless, White retains decent winning chances. Carlsen, with his excellent technique, ultimately managed to get the full point.

...1-0

White's advantage changed its nature multiple times, but it was always there. When the position demands it, we shouldn't hesitate to go for a transformation. As we have already noted in previous cases, for example in the game Sarin – Keymer, failing to capitalize on such chances might be the reason we fail to convert a long-term advantage.

It's also a good opportunity to repeat ourselves one more time by bringing our focus to Black's 27th move. Much like in the Carlsen – Naiditsch game, Black had exactly one chance to force himself out of trouble. Had he played either of the (admittedly tough to find) improvements noted at that pivotal moment, the ensuing torture could have been avoided.

Conclusion

Whoa! That was a big chapter. Long-term advantages in chess abound, and knowing which pieces to exchange and why, depending on the scenario, is a tremendously useful skill. We talked about so many topics and yet still only scratched the surface of some of them. Alas, a book can only be so long.

We started by discussing cases where style might come into play, a topic which came up various times throughout the chapter. We also pointed out the importance of maintaining tension as opposed to prematurely releasing it.

We continued by talking about one of the most common long-term advantages: the bishop pair. How to use it, when to get rid of it, and how to play against it. We highlighted the importance of the bishop's ability to hunt down and capture a knight and explained why that's such a big deal.

We moved on to discussing another highly important long-term factor: pawn structures. We showed how exchanges can help us convert a better structure and when to refrain from making a trade. We included a dedicated section about the queen exchange, since this influences the course of the game much more than any other type of trade.

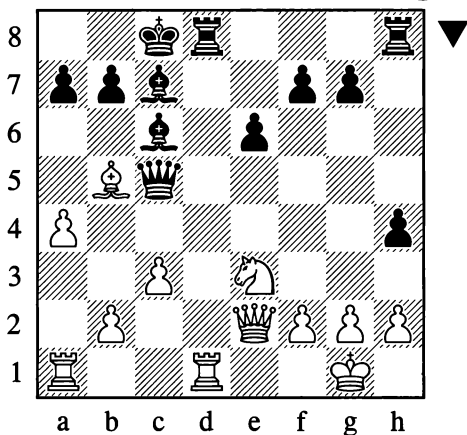
We briefly touched upon the importance of the mobility of a structure and talked about the power of a queen and knight working in harmony. Finally, we looked at the important topic of transforming one kind of advantage into another when it is beneficial or necessary.

Exercises

Baadur Jobava – Arjun Erigaisi

Internet (blitz) 2021

4-1

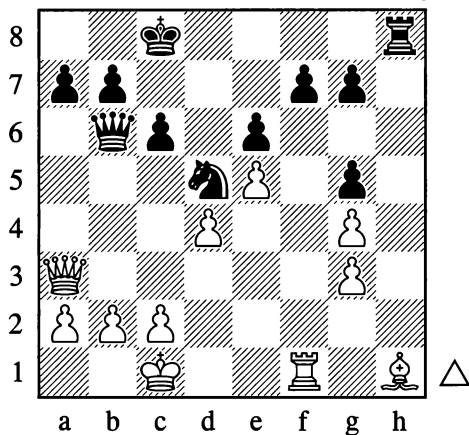


Black to play

Amir Bagheri – Timur Arestanov

Rasht 1998

4-3

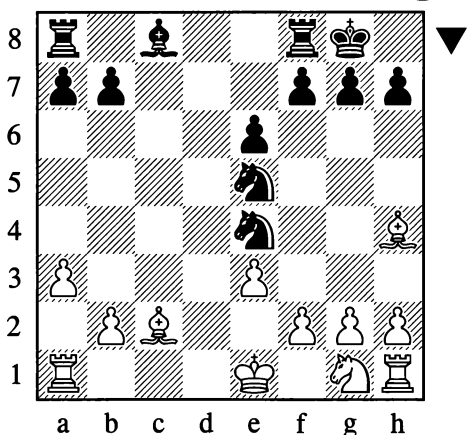


White to play

David Howell – Nils Grandelius

London 2022

4-2

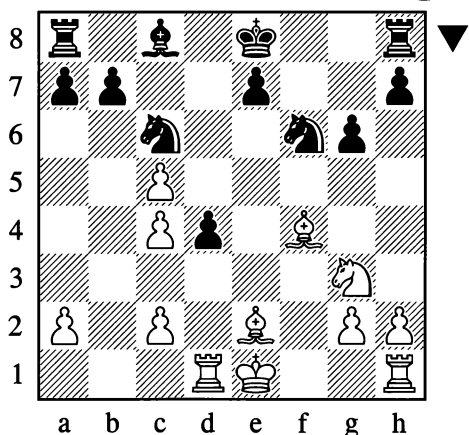


Black to play

Elshan Moradiabadi – Amir Bagheri

Cebu 2007

4-4

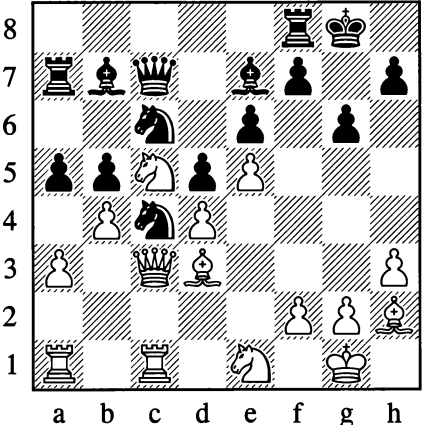


Black to play

Amir Bagheri – Smbat Lputian

Warsaw 2005

4-5

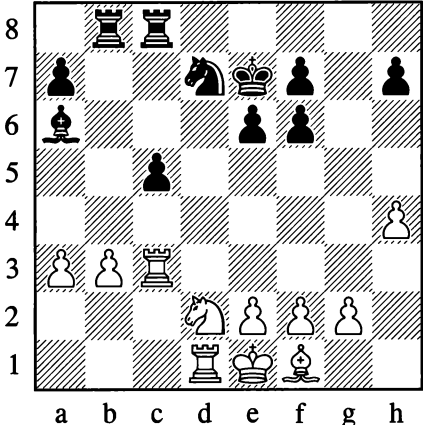


Black to play

Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Samuel Sevian

Krasnaya Polyana 2021

4-7

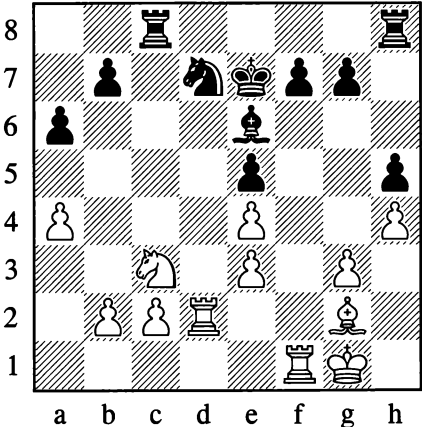


White to play

Aryan Tari – Fabiano Caruana

Stavanger 2020

4-6

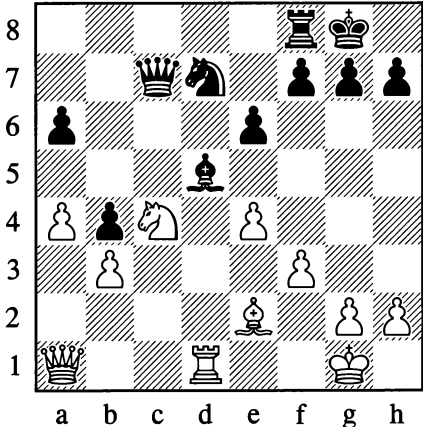


Black to play

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov – Leinier Dominguez Perez

Bucharest 2022

4-8

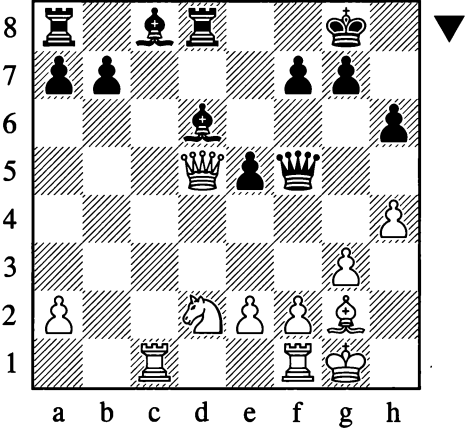


Black to play

Aleksandar Indjic – Jorden van Foreest

Munich 2022

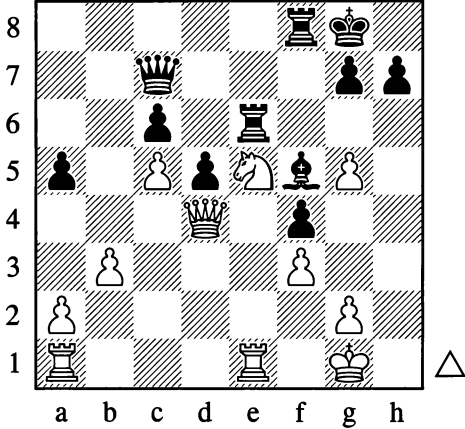
4-9



Arjun Erigaisi – Abhijeet Gupta

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022

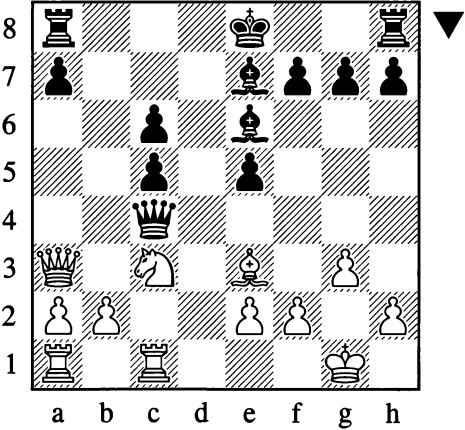
4-11



Sebastien Maze – Marc Andria Maurizzi

Barcelona 2021

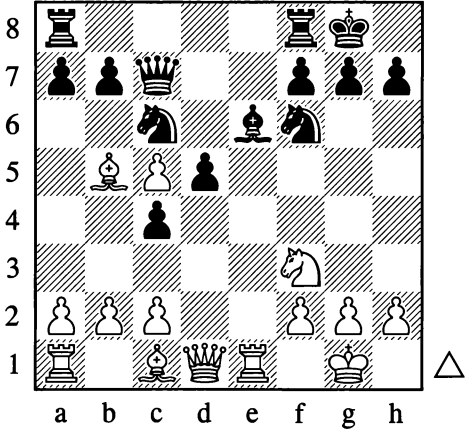
4-10



David Howell – Karolis Juksta

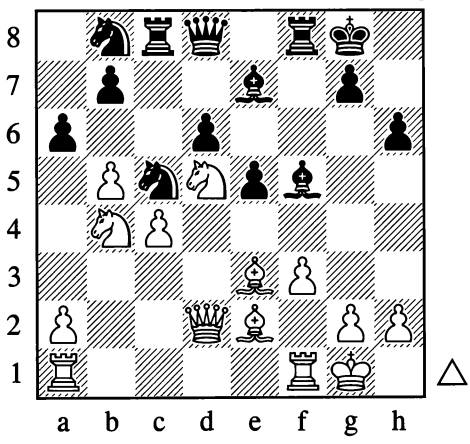
Chennai (Olympiad) 2022

4-12



Leinier Dominguez Perez – Jose Fernando Cubas

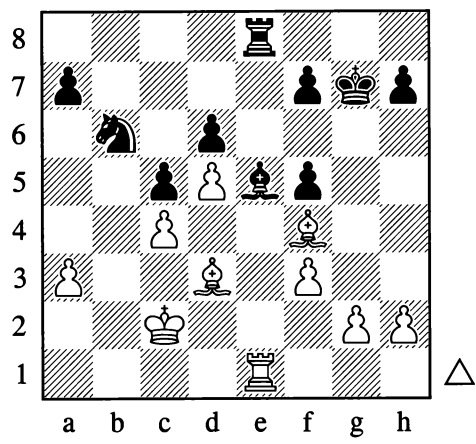
Chennai (Olympiad) 2022 (4-13)



White to play

Magnus Carlsen – Loek van Wely

Wijk aan Zee 2013 (4-14)

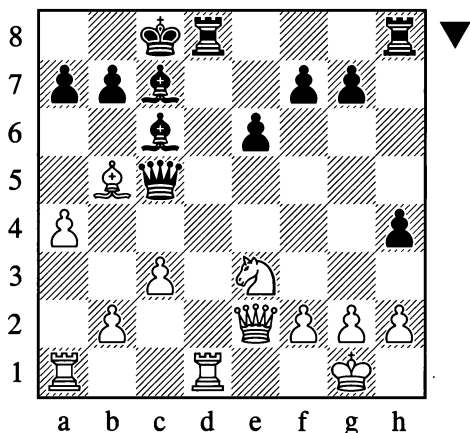


White to play

Solutions

4-1. Baadur Jobava – Arjun Erigaisi

Internet (blitz) 2021



As we have seen in the games section, when you have the bishop pair, the exchange of queens usually works in your favour.

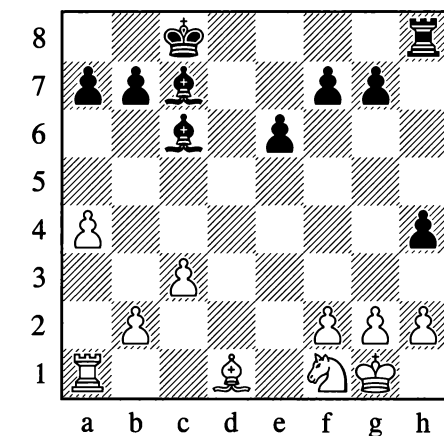
20...♔e5!

Black forces the exchange of queens by creating dangerous threats against the opponent's king,

21.♘f1

21.g3 is clearly suicidal: 21...hxg3 22.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 23.fxg3 ♖b6 Black wins.

21...♔xe2 22.♕xe2 ♖xd1 23.♕xd1



White has no compensation for the opponent's bishop pair.

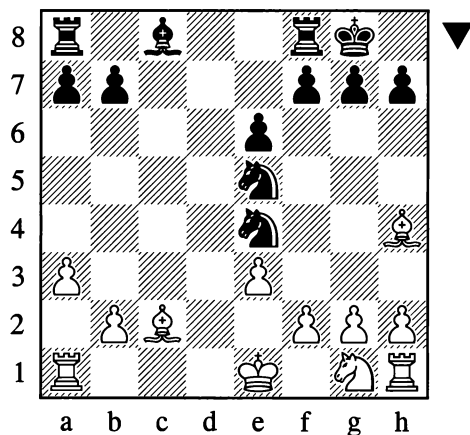
23...h3!?

One of many possible continuations. Black retains a good advantage but the game was eventually drawn.

...½–½

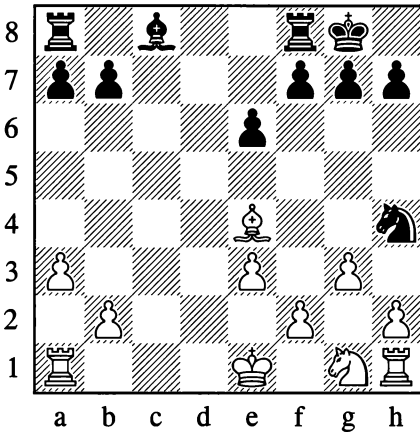
4-2. David Howell – Nils Grandelius

London 2022



15...♖g6!

This move is crucial for Black. He needs to eliminate White's bishop pair.

16.♙xe4 ♜xh4 17.g3**17...♝f5!?**

Black plays energetically, trying to avoid any kind of unpleasant, Catalan-style positions.

18.♙c2

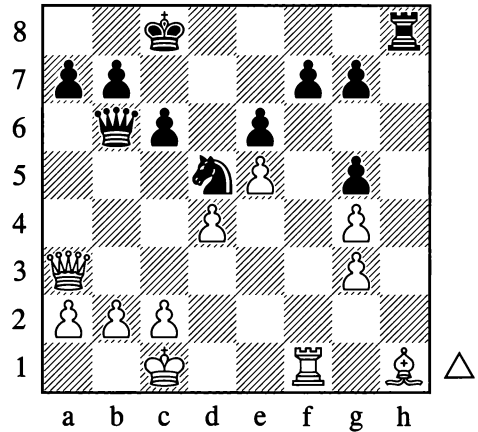
18.gxh4 fxe4 19.♜e2 ♙d7 leads to a double-edged position with chances for both sides. The seemingly weak black pawn on e6 is actually extremely useful, as it prevents White from permanently posting his knight on the d4- and f4-squares.

18...♜g6 19.f4 ♙d7 20.♜f3 ♙c6 21.♞e2 ♙d5 22.♞hc1 ♞ac8 23.♙d3 ♜e7

White has only a tiny edge, if anything at all. ...½-½

4-3. Amir Bagheri – Timur Arestanov

Rasht 1998

**22.♙xd5!**

After exchanging the minor pieces, the position gets quieter and that amplifies the importance of White's structural advantage.

22...exd5

After 22...cxd5? 23.♞c3† ♜b8 24.♞xf7 White is clearly winning.

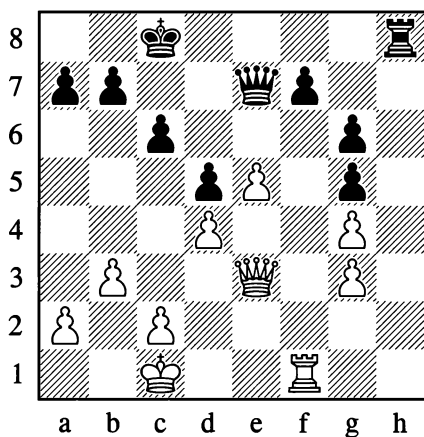
23.♞d3 g6

Also not helpful is 23...♞f8 when 24.♞f5† ♜b8 25.e6 ♞xd4 is forced, and 26.♞xf7! is a cute finish.

24.b3

White does not need to rush to take on f7; his advantage is permanent after all. Rushing will only create chances for the opponent to muddy the waters.

24...♞c7 25.♞e3 ♞e7



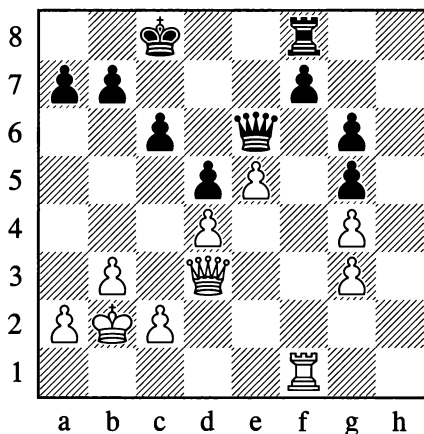
26.♙b2!

Again, White does not need to rush. Let's first stop the annoying check on a3.

26...♜e8 27.♙f3 ♜f8 28.♙d3

White wants to play ♜f6 next, establishing total control.

28...♙e6



29.♜f6!

White has made all the preparatory moves, and it is time for the final assault. The black queen gets dragged away from the defence of the king.

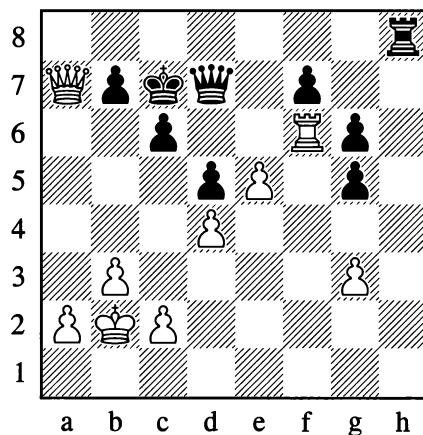
29...♙xg4 30.♙c3

Black can do nothing to stop the queen from invading via c5. (However, it is worth noting that White is not yet threatening ♜xc6†, which would only lead to a draw.)

30...♙d7

The queen must guard the f7-pawn, as the rook is about to be chased away.

31.♙c5 ♜h8 32.♙xa7 ♙c7



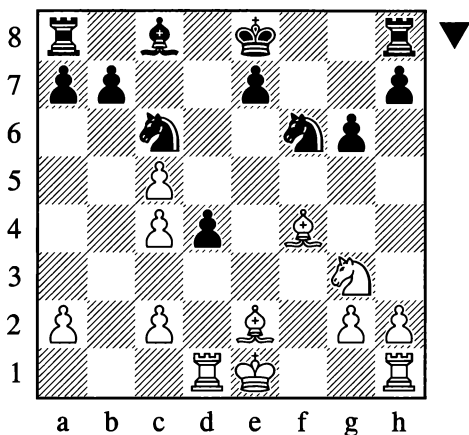
33.a4!

White's a-pawn also joins the attack.

33...♜h7 34.a5 ♙c8 35.a6 ♙b8 36.♜xc6†

A nice finishing touch. The black queen falls.
1-0

Cebu 2007



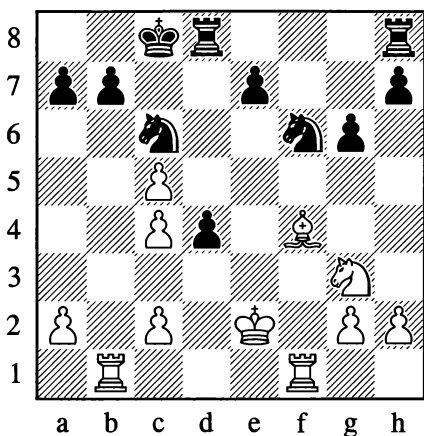
15...♙g4!

Before attacking the weaknesses of the opponent's position, Black wants to get rid of White's bishop pair. In fact, the bishop pair is the only thing White has in exchange for his terrible structure. With one of the bishops gone, he will be left with a miserable defensive task.

16.♖b1?

White should have played 16. $\text{Q} \times \text{g4}$ $\text{Q} \times \text{g4}$ 17. h3 $\text{Q} \times \text{f6}$ 18. 0-0 trying to at least get a small lead in development.

16...♙xe2 17.♔xe2 0-0-0 18.♖hf1

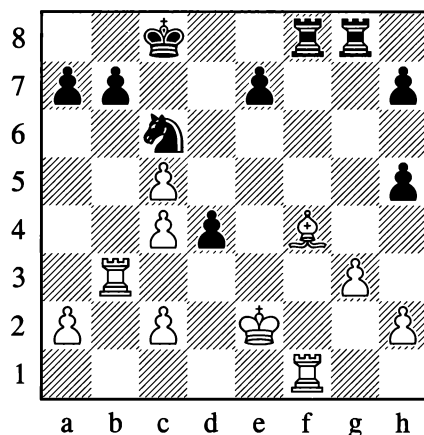


18...♘h5!?

An interesting idea. Black wanted to push his e-pawn with ...e7-e5-e4, but the loose f6-knight was a nuisance. However, it was not the most accurate way to play.

Black could have gained a big advantage with 18...h5! threatening ...h5-h4 and ...d6-e4, and if White decides to stop that with 19.h4, then the g4-square is terribly weak. After 19...d6-g4 Black is in complete control.

19.♘xh5 gxh5 20.♖b3 ♜hg8 21.g3 ♜df8

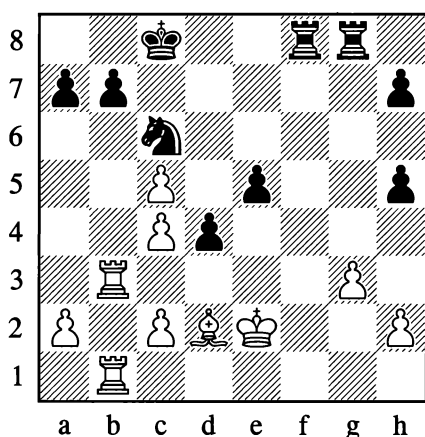


22.♖fb1?!

In a bad position, White makes a decisive mistake. The doubled rooks on the b-file serve no real purpose.

22.♔d2 was more circumspect, but still after 22...♖xf1 23.♕xf1 ♖f8† 24.♕e2 ♖f5 Black has a clear advantage.

22...e5 23.♖d2



23...Rf7

It is hard to choose a concrete approach when slow positional moves seem good enough for an advantage, but here 23...h4! was really strong: 24.Rf3 (24.Rxb7 could be met by 24...hxg3 25.hxg3 Rxc3 and Black gets a winning position. One of his main threats is ...d3† with the idea of clearing the d4-square for his knight.) 24...d3†! 25.Rxd3 Qd4† Black wins.

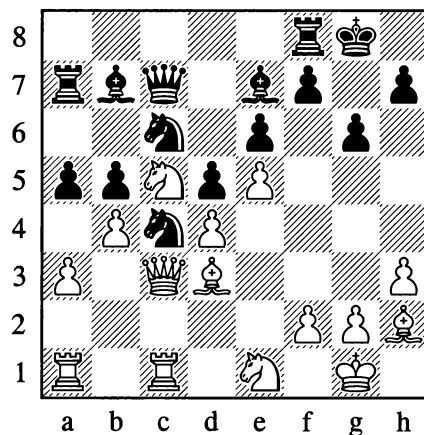
24.Rf3 Rxf3 25.Qxf3 Rf8† 26.Qe2 e4

Black still has a big advantage, but the game was eventually drawn.

...½-½

4-5. Amir Bagheri – Smbat Lputian

Warsaw 2005

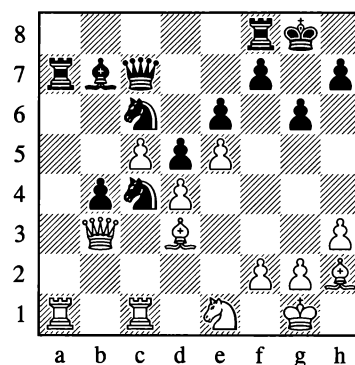


27...Qxc5!

At first glance, it might seem like White has a long-term advantage due to the black structure restricting the b7-bishop. Lputian cleverly takes advantage of the lack of coordination between the white pieces and picks a great moment to change the structure. He will get to open a diagonal for his currently terrible b7-bishop, no matter which way White recaptures. White's bishop pair will amount to nothing due to the completely closed central structure.

28.dxc5

In the event of 28.bxc5 b4! Black once again manages to open a diagonal for the b7-bishop: 29.axb4 axb4 30.♖b3

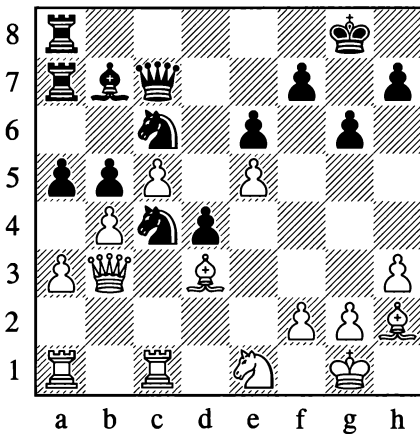


30...♙a6 The bishop is activated. (30...♜xd4? 31.♞xb4 only leads to equality.) 31.♙f4 ♞b8 32.♙e3 ♜6a5 33.♞d1 b3 Black is winning. All his pieces are extremely active and the b3-pawn is terribly dangerous.

28...d4!

Black's formerly worst piece becomes a monster.

29.♞b3 ♞fa8



30.♜c2?!

The decisive mistake.

White had to play 30.bxa5 to keep the game going, but after 30...♜6xa5 31.♞b4 his position is extremely unpleasant anyway. (31.♞xb5? loses on the spot after 31...♙c6 32.♞b1 ♜d2 and the fork on b3 will decide the outcome.)

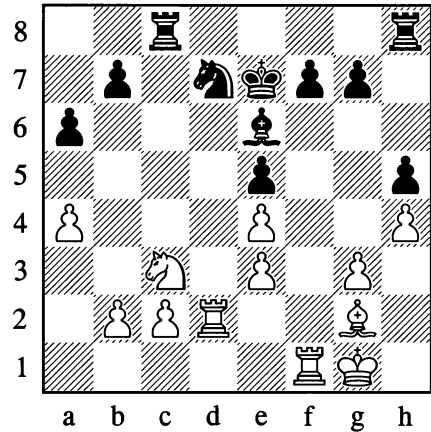
30...axb4 31.axb4 ♞xa1 32.♞xa1 ♞xa1† 33.♜xa1 ♜6xe5 34.♙f1 ♞c6

Black is a pawn up with the more active pieces. He is completely winning.

...0-1

4-6. Aryan Tari – Fabiano Caruana

Stavanger 2020

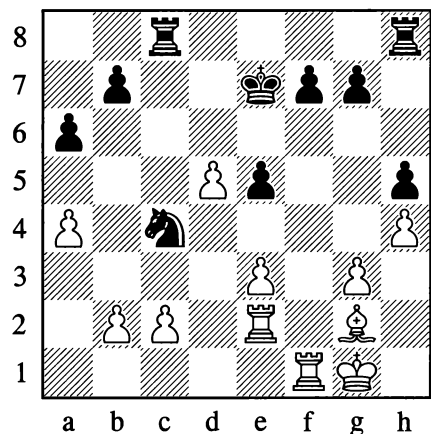


20...♜b6!

Caruana intends to enter an endgame a pawn down with his good knight against the opponent's passive bishop. Simplifications tend to favour Black because of White's terrible structure.

The thematic 20...♞xc3!? isn't too bad either. After 21.bxc3 a5! White's structure is so bad that even an extra exchange and pawn are not enough to give him an advantage. However, Black has fewer winning chances here compared to the game.

21.♜d5† ♙xd5 22.exd5 ♜c4 23.♞e2



23...♟d6!

The point behind Black's whole operation. The excellent black knight on d6 fully compensates for the pawn deficit. It is extremely hard to make the presence of the extra pawn felt, while it's quite easy to prove how much more active the black rooks are compared to their counterparts.

But not 23...♟xb2? 24.♞b1 when the b-file opens in White's favour.

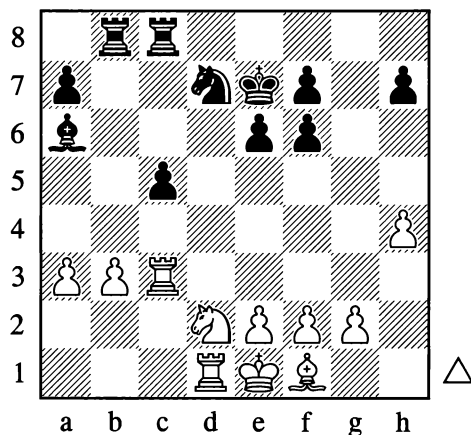
24.e4 a5!? 25.♞a1 ♞c4 26.c3 f6

Black is completely fine and Caruana went on to win.

...0-1

4-7. Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Samuel Sevian

Krasnaya Polyana 2021

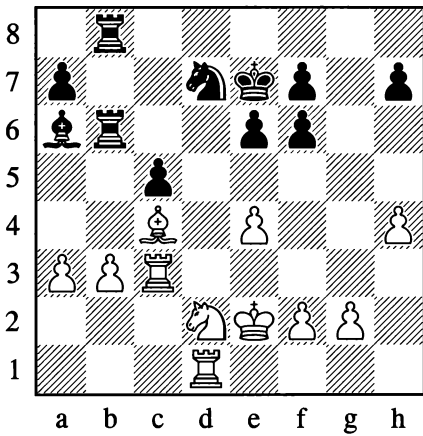
**21.e4!**

Having a better pawn structure, Duda gains space and proposes an exchange of the light-squared bishops. At the same time, he prevents Black from playing ...f6-f5, connecting his pawns, gaining space, and creating the f6-square for his knight. White still doesn't have much of an objective advantage but his play is easier and Black must play accurately to hold the balance.

21...♞c6 22..♞c4

22.♟c4!? was also worth considering.

22...♞cb6 23.♞e2



23...♙xc4†

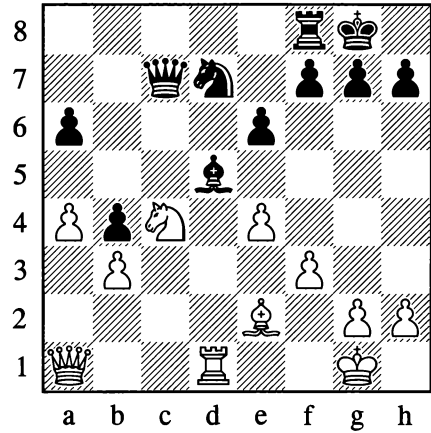
23...♘e5 would give Black enough counterplay to compensate for his damaged structure.

24.♞xc4 ♞a6 25.♞a1 ♞g8 26.g3 ♞b8 27.♞c3

White has a slight but lasting advantage.
...1–0

4-8. Shakhriyar Mamedyarov – Leinier Dominguez Perez

Bucharest 2022



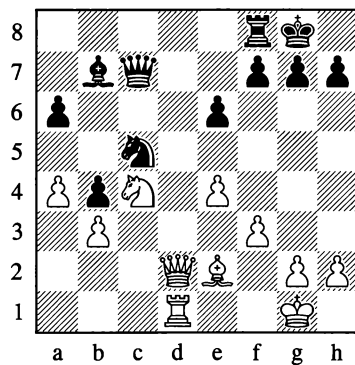
22...♙xc4!

The white knight was strong, and the black bishop was restricted by the white pawns. This exchange is essentially forced.

22...♙b7?

Preserving the bishop would prove to be a big mistake after:

23.♞c1 ♘c5 24.♞d2!



24...♙xb3

After 24...a5 25.♞d6! ♞xd6 26.♙xd6 ♙c6 27.♞b1 ♞d8 28.♙c4 ♞a8 29.♙f2 f6 30.♙e3 Black's rook is tied to the defence of the a5-pawn and White gains a huge advantage.

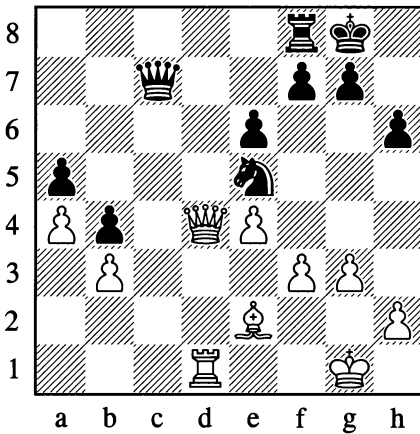
25. ♖xb4 ♕c5† 26. ♖xc5 ♜xc5 27. ♜b6

All the white pieces are more active than their counterparts.

23. ♙xc4

White has a big problem with his structure. All his pawns, except the one on h2, are placed on the wrong colour.

23...a5 24. ♖d4 ♜e5 25. ♙e2 h6 26. g3



Black doesn't have a bad bishop on b7, but he is still in some danger. White is threatening to push the knight back with f3-f4, followed by putting his bishop again on c4, establishing complete control.

26...g5!

A very important move. Black places another pawn on the opposite colour of White's bishop and, while gaining more space on the kingside, he also strengthens the position of his central knight.

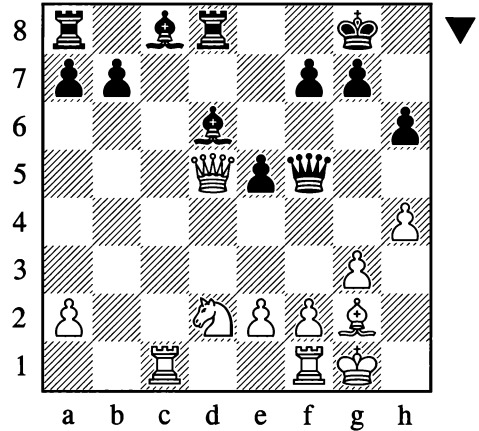
27. ♖e3 ♜c8

Black has a slight advantage. The c3-square and the b3-pawn are weak, and Black's moves are much easier. He eventually won a nice game.

...0-1

4-9. Aleksandar Indjic – Jorden van Foreest

Munich 2022



Black is a pawn up and has the advantage of the two bishops, but his position is not without drawbacks. His pieces are passive and completely tied up to the defence of his weaknesses.

19...♖e6!

Black is ready to return his extra pawn to bring the dormant pieces into play.

20. ♖a5

The best move.

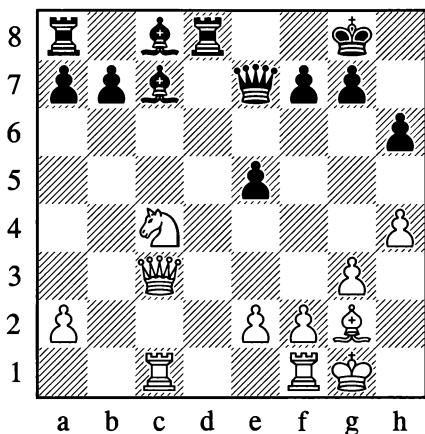
White is not interested in regaining material equality if it means that the opponent's pieces can be activated. After 20. ♖xe6?! ♙xe6! 21. ♙xb7 ♜ab8 22. ♙f3 ♙a3 23. ♜c2 ♜dc8! we can see once again that the exchange of queens favours the side possessing the bishop pair. Black is clearly better.

20...♖e7

Black controls the c7-square one more time and opens the diagonal for his c8-bishop.

21. ♖c4 ♕c7 22. ♖c3?!

22. ♖a3 was the cleanest path to equality: 22... ♖xa3 23. ♖xa3 ♕b6 24. ♖c4 White wants to take on b6 followed by ♖b1 and exchange all the queenside pawns. 24... ♕c7 can be met with 25. ♖a3 and White is safe.



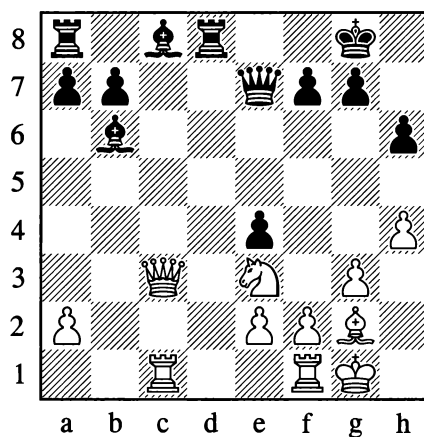
22...e4!

Freeing the path for the dark-squared bishop while restricting the g2-bishop at the same time. With the long diagonal closed, Black is preparing to develop his light-squared bishop at long last.

23. ♖e3

23. ♖a3! was again the best way for White to hold on.

23...♕b6



24. ♖c4?

This was probably based on mistaken calculation of the lines following White's next move.

After 24. ♖fd1 ♕e6! 25. ♕xe4 ♖ac8 Black seizes the initiative, but White can continue fighting.

24...♖d4

Black is already objectively winning.

25. ♖xc8†

This seems desperate, but White did not really have an option anymore.

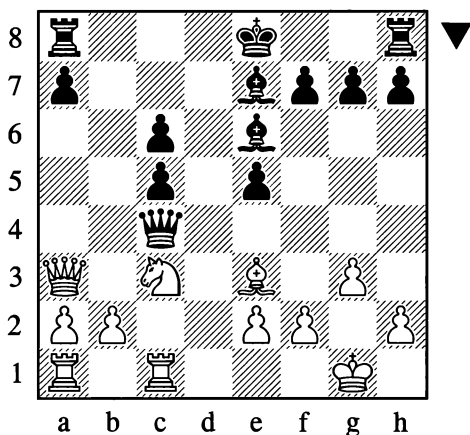
After 25. ♖b5 ♕d7 26. ♖b1 ♕e6 27. ♖fd1 ♖b4 28. ♖a1 ♕xe3 29. fxe3 ♕g4 Black wins.

25...♖xc8 26. ♖xc8† ♖d8 27. ♖d5 ♖e6 28. ♖xb6 ♖xc8 29. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 30. ♕xe4 b5

Black duly converted his winning position. ...0-1

4-10. Sebastien Maze – Marc Andria Maurizzi

Barcelona 2021



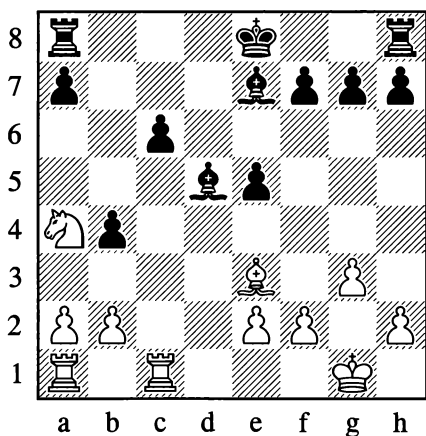
16...♔b4!

Having the two bishops and an extra pawn, Black offers the exchange of queens.

17.♕xb4

It would have been better for White not to restore Black's structure: 17.♕a4 ♖xa4 18.♘xa4 White retains some compensation.

17...cxb4 18.♘a4 ♔d5

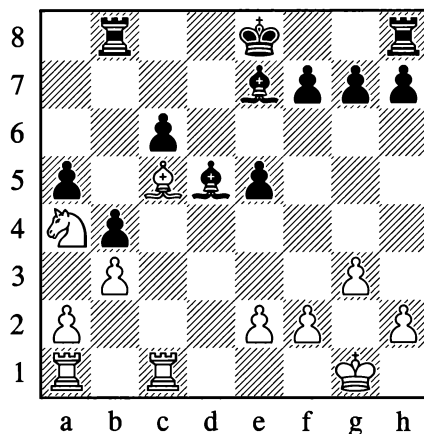


White is on the back foot and must scramble for some compensation before Black gets to finish his development.

19.♔c5 ♖b8 20.b3

20.a3! would have been a better move, trying to activate the a1-rook.

20...a5



21.♔xe7?!

This exchange only helps Black's development.

White's last chance was: 21.f3 e4 (21...f5 helps White on his mission to create a mess after 22.e4! when he should have enough counterplay to hold the draw.) 22.fxg4 ♔xe4 23.♔xe7 ♔xe7 24.a3 and again White gains some counterplay.

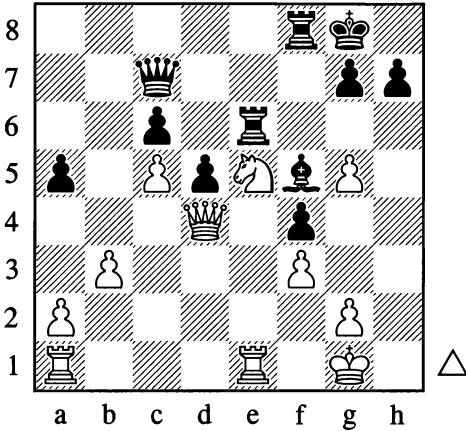
21...♔xe7 22.f3 f5 23.♖c5 ♖b5 24.♖ac1 ♔d6 25.h4 ♖e8 26.♖5c2 e4

White has no compensation for the pawn deficit.

...0-1

4-11. Arjun Erigaisi – Abhijeet Gupta

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022



27. ♖d3!

Erigaisi allows the exchange of his strong knight with the opponent's bishop as he needs to obtain control of the vital open e-file.

If 27. ♜e2, then 27... ♙d3 is a nice trick. After 28. ♜xd3 ♜xe5 29. ♜ae1 ♜fe8 Black has no problems.

27. ♜xf4? would be mistaken due to 27... ♙e4 28. ♜g3 ♜xe5 29. ♜xe4 ♜fe8 when it is Black who obtains an advantage.

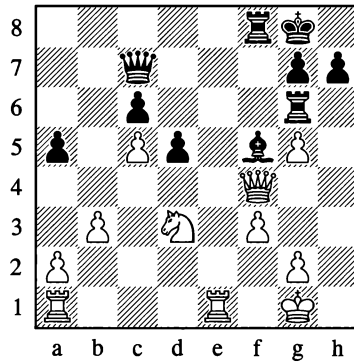
27... ♜xe1?

Surrendering any control over the e-file.

Fighting for the e-file is also bad: 27... ♜fe8? 28. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 29. ♜xf4 ♜f7 30. ♜e1! ♜xe1† 31. ♜xe1 On top of the extra pawn, White has the powerful queen and knight duo.

Instead, Black should have played:

27... ♜g6! 28. ♜xf4



28... ♜d8

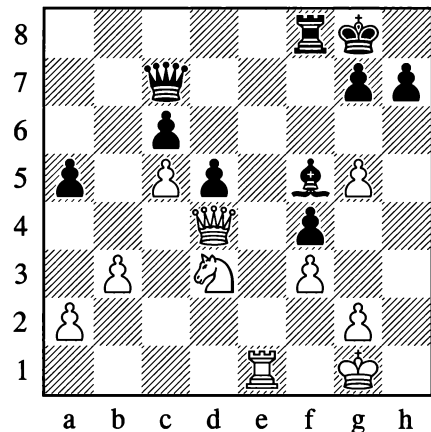
The exchange of queens is in White's favour: 28... ♜xf4 29. ♜xf4 ♜xg5 30. ♜f2 White is much better. He has the more active pieces, he controls the e-file, and he can put some pressure on the weak c6-pawn with either ♜e2-d4 or ♜d3-e5.

After 28... ♜a7 29. ♜e5 White is much better.

29. ♜e5 ♜e6

White retains only a slight advantage.

28... ♜xe1



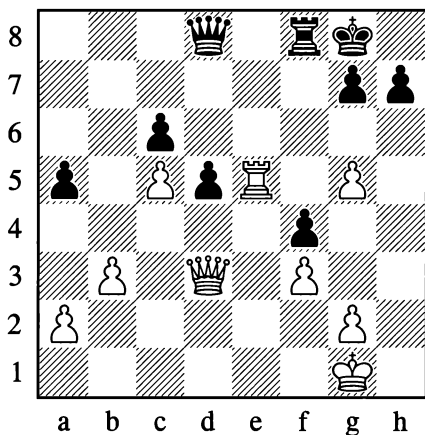
28... ♙xd3 29. ♜xd3 ♜d8

In the event of 29... ♜a7 30. ♜c3 ♜f5 31. b4 axb4 32. ♜xb4 ♜xg5 33. a4 h6 34. a5 White has a good advantage due to his dangerous passed a-pawn and the black rook being out of action.

30.♞e5?

White loses almost all his advantage.

He should have played 30.♞a6 when the black pawns are extremely vulnerable.

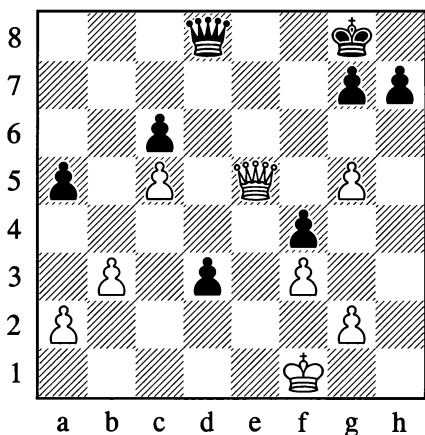
**30...♞e8!**

Fighting for the e-file.

31.♞d4 ♞xe5?

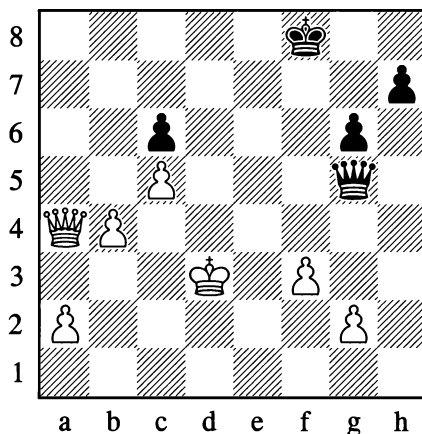
Black should not have abandoned the fight for the open file that easily.

Correct was 31...♞e7! threatening ...♞e8, and after 32.♞xf4 Black can obtain complete equality with: 32...♞c7! 33.♞f5 ♞e1† 34.♞f2 ♞xf4 35.♞xf4 ♞c1 The game should end in a draw.

32.♞xe5 d4 33.♞f1! d3**34.♞e1!**

The white king moves to block the d-pawn so that the queen can focus solely on the offensive. Victory is near.

34...a4 35.b4 g6 36.♞d2 ♞d7 37.♞xf4 ♞d5 38.♞b8† ♞f7 39.♞a7† ♞f8 40.♞xa4 ♞g5† 41.♞xd3



White's position is completely winning; Black has no chance of giving perpetual check.

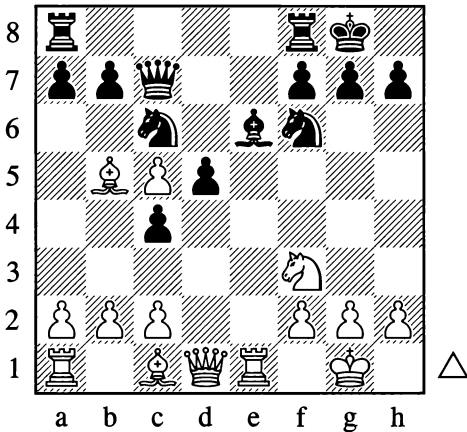
41...♞f5† 42.♞d2 ♞g5† 43.♞d1 ♞e3 44.♞a8† ♞g7 45.♞b7† ♞h6 46.♞d7

Black resigned.

1-0

4-12. David Howell – Karolis Juksta

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022



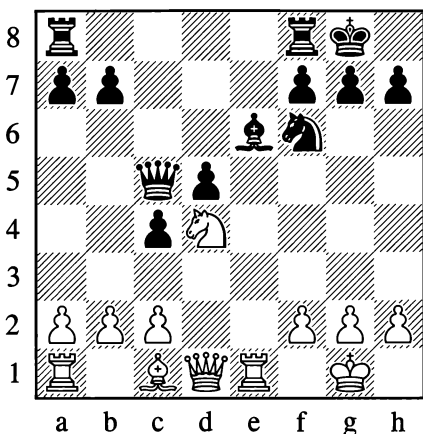
14. ♗xc6!

Black's central control is too great for White's bishop pair to show its true strength. Thus, White correctly gives up one of his bishops to transform his advantage of the bishop pair into control of the central dark squares. This exchange is in fact a prelude to the next steps of White's operation.

14... ♖xc6

14... bxc6 15. ♖d4 leaves White with a slight but stable advantage.

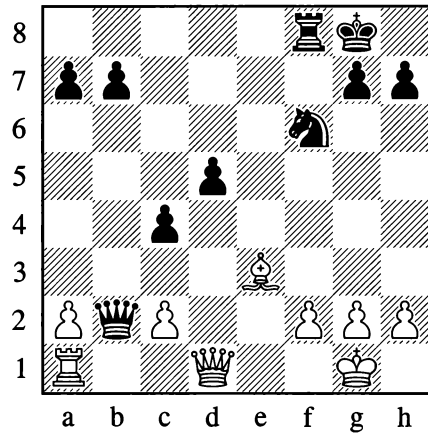
15. ♖d4 ♖xc5



16. ♗xe6!

The second transformation. White wants to enter a position where his bishop outperforms the opponent's knight.

16... fxe6 17. ♖xe6 ♖b6 18. ♖xf8 ♗xf8 19. ♗e3 ♖xb2



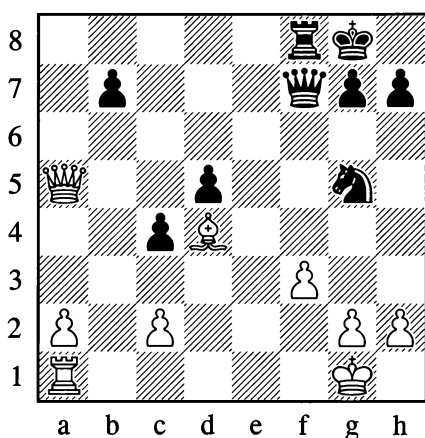
20. ♗xa7

Since White has a bishop against a knight, it helps him to break the symmetry of the pawn structure as much as possible.

20... ♖b5 21. ♗d4

The position is open and there is play on both flanks, so the white bishop is better than the black knight. The domination of the dark squares is another factor helping White's cause.

21... ♖d7 22. ♖e1 ♖e4 23. ♖a5 ♖f7 24. f3 ♖g5

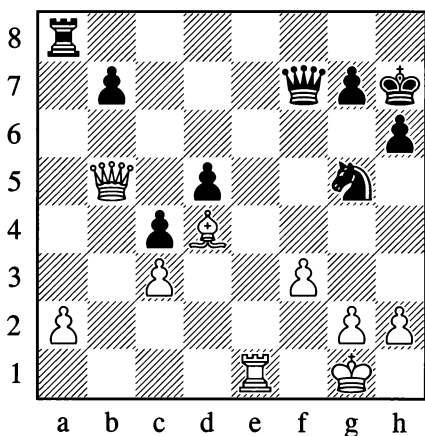


25.♞e1

Simple chess! White controls the vital open e-file and activates his rook.

25...h6 26.c3 ♕h7 27.♞b5 ♞a8??

Correct was 27...♞g6! 28.♕h1 ♖e6! 29.♞xd5 ♖xd4 30.♞xd4 ♞d3! when Black escapes to a worse but holdable endgame.



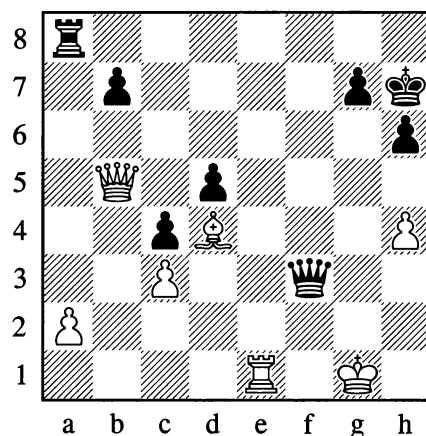
28.h4!

White asks the black knight a question that has no good answer.

28...♖xf3†

After 28...♖e6 29.♞xd5 White wins.

29.gxf3 ♞xf3



30.♞b1†!

White combines defence and attack with this strong intermediate check. The game is over.

30...♞d3

30...♕g8 31.♞g6 is curtains.

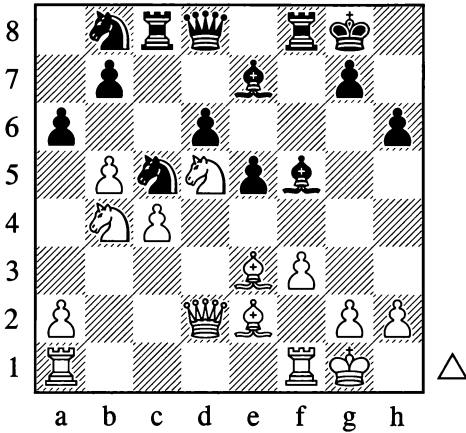
31.h5 b5 32.♞xd3† cxd3 33.♞e7

Black resigned.

1-0

4-13. Leinier Dominguez Perez – Jose Fernando Cubas

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022



White has a dominating knight on d5.

20. ♖xe7!

He gives it up for the passive bishop on e7! However, this is in fact an exchange of the e7-bishop with the b4-knight, not with the d5-knight. The bishop on e7 is indeed “bad”, but it is an important defender of the backward d6-pawn. In contrast, the b4-knight was completely useless if it wasn't going to replace its comrade on d5 at some point.

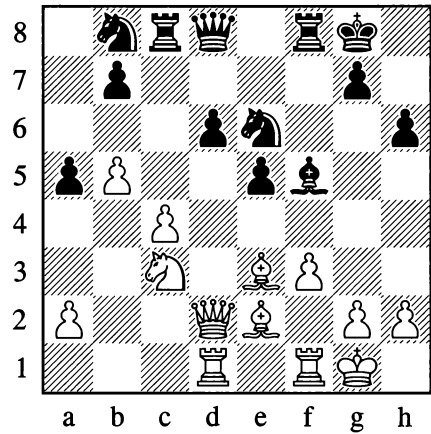
20... ♜xe7 21. ♝ad1 a5

21... ♜fd8 wasn't going to help: 22. ♖d5 ♜e6 23. ♖b6 ♜c7 24. ♙f2! With the idea of ♙h4. White is objectively winning.

22. ♖d5 ♜d8 23. ♖c3 ♖e6

Black doesn't bother protecting the d6-pawn.

23... ♜f6 can be met with 24. ♜d5† when 24... ♙e6 is forced, as otherwise the c5-knight falls. There follows 25. ♜xd6 and White wins.



24. ♜d5!?

Black has no good way of protecting his b7-pawn.

24. ♜xd6 was also winning.

24... ♜e8 25. ♜xb7

Black has no compensation for the pawn deficit and his opponent's bishop pair. The game is over.

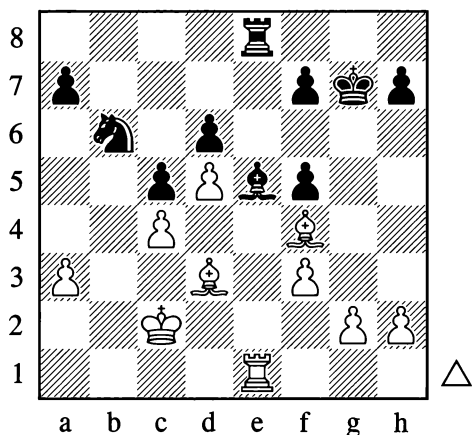
25... ♖f4 26. ♙xf4 exf4 27. ♜d5† ♙e6 28. ♜d4 ♖d7 29. ♖e4 ♙f7 30. ♜f2 ♜e5 31. ♖xd6

Black resigned.

1–0

4-14. Magnus Carlsen – Loek van Wely

Wijk aan Zee 2013



White has a dominating position. He has the two-bishop advantage and a better pawn structure. How can he increase his advantage? Which piece should White look to exchange?

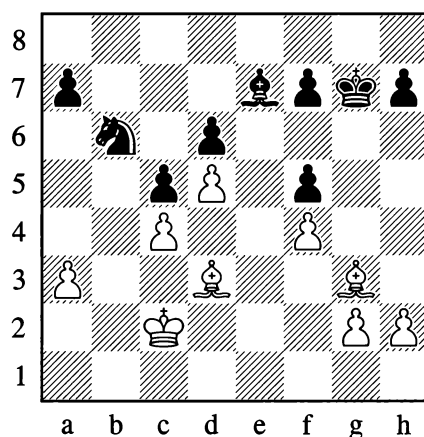
27.♙g3!

Taking advantage of the fact that Black's e5-bishop is pinned to the e8-rook, Carlsen creates the threat of f3-f4 and forces the exchange of rooks.

27...♖e7

After 27...♖f8 28.f4 ♘d4 29.♖xe8† ♖xe8 30.♗b3 the f5-pawn falls and White wins.

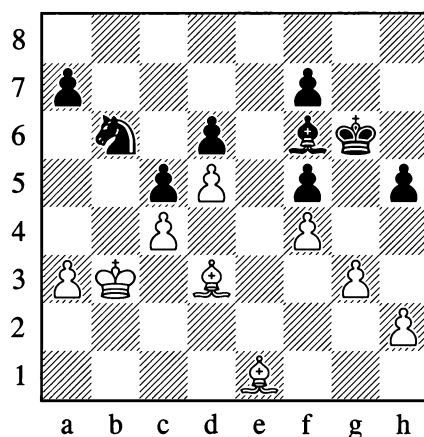
28.f4 ♘f6 29.♖xe7 ♘xe7



30.♙e1

Magnus is in no rush to take the f5-pawn. He knows it's eventually going to fall anyway, so he first improves the position of his pieces.

30...h5 31.g3 ♘f6 32.♗b3 ♖g6



33.h3!

The threat of g3-g4 is irresistible and the f5-pawn falls. After that, converting the material advantage would be a piece of cake for the greatest endgame player of all time. Van Wely decided to immediately throw in the towel.

1-0

Chapter 5

Exchanges and Initiative

One of the main attributes of the chess master is always looking for ways to take over the initiative. It is always preferable to be the one creating threats and dictating the play, rather than the one reacting defensively. The initiative is normally a short-term imbalance though, of course, it can last for many moves if handled correctly.

In most cases, the player having the initiative should avoid unnecessary exchanges, as that would release some of the pressure exerted by the disparity in activity. However, we will also see examples where exchanging the right pieces can play a crucial role in exploiting the initiative.

Activity Matters Most

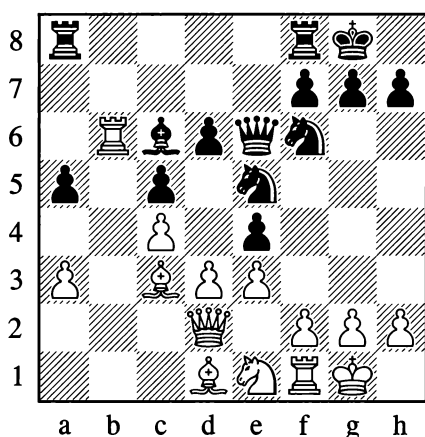
We have already noted several times in this book how a powerful initiative can overshadow any long-term considerations. This in turn means that when a concrete chance to seize the initiative arises, we shouldn't hesitate to part with any long-term advantage if we need to do so.

In the next example, taking a page out of the section of our previous chapter concerning the bishop pair, the German prodigy parts with one of his bishops (the strongest of the two!) in order to exploit a defect in his opponent's position and seize a powerful initiative.

Vincent Keymer – Alan Pichot

Biel 2021

1.c4 e6 2.♘c3 ♙b4 3.♞b3 a5 4.a3 ♙xc3 5.♞xc3 ♘f6 6.b4 b6 7.♙b2 ♙b7 8.♘f3 0-0 9.e3 d6 10.♙e2 c5 11.0-0 ♘c6 12.bxc5 bxc5 13.d3 ♘e7 14.♞ab1 ♘g6 15.♞d2 ♙c6 16.♘e1 e5 17.♙f3 ♞d7 18.♙c3 e4 19.♙d1 ♞e6 20.♞b6 ♘e5

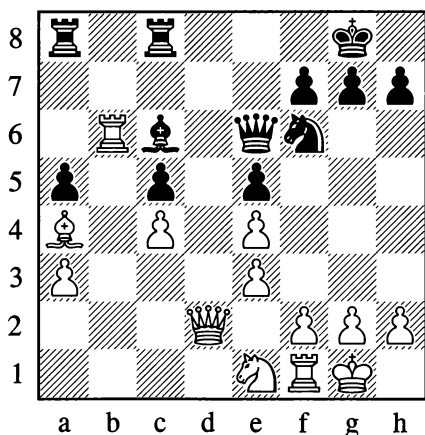


White has the bishop pair but many of his pieces are passively waiting on the first rank.

21. ♖xe5!

The uncontested dark-squared bishop was White's pride and joy but, with this exchange, White creates an unpleasant pin along the sixth rank. He will exploit this pin by using it to activate all his other pieces with gain of tempo.

21...dxe5 22. ♕a4 ♖fc8 23. dxe4



23... ♖xe4?!

Instead of taking back the pawn, Black should have tried to play actively and break the pin:

23... ♖ab8!

Taking advantage of the rook on f1 being blocked by the knight.

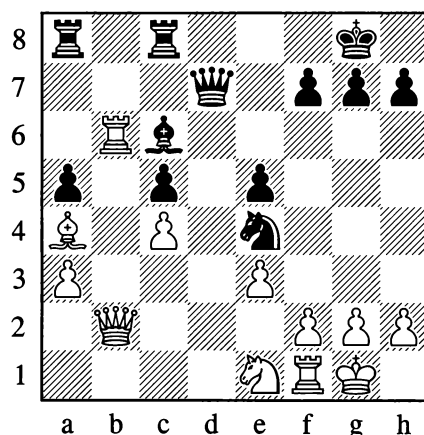
24. ♖xc6

24. ♖a6? is bad. After 24... ♗xc4! 25. ♖xc6 ♗xa4 26. ♖xc8† ♖xc8 Black gets a good advantage due to his strong passed c-pawn and his more active pieces.

24... ♖xc6 25. ♕xc6 ♗xc6 26. f3 ♗a4

With some compensation for the pawn deficit.

24. ♗b2 ♗d7



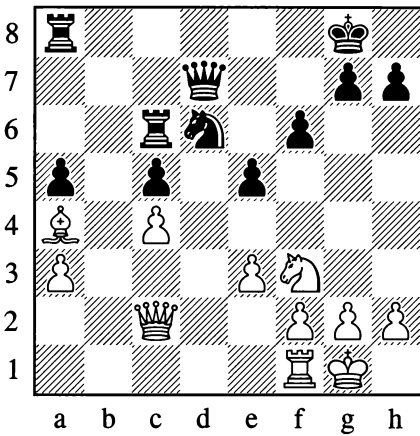
25. ♖xc6!

Since White will always be able to get back the sacrificed material, this is essentially just another exchange and not a sacrifice. Black managed to break the pin along the sixth rank but White immediately creates another pin, this time on the a4-e8 diagonal.

25... ♖xc6 26. ♖f3 f6 27. ♗c2!

Black weakened some light squares with his previous move, so White intensifies the pressure on that colour complex.

27... ♖d6

**28.♖d3**

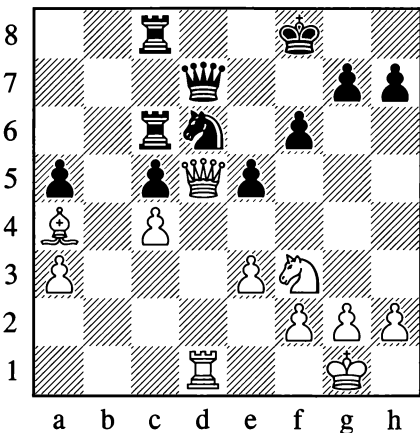
Quite logical but not the most accurate.

28.♞d1! was a better option. I (Amir) vividly remember how the famous grandmaster Mikhail Gurevich always emphasized simple but powerful moves like this when analysing games. After 28...♖b7 29.♞xc6 ♖xc6 30.♞d5 White stands much better due to his more active pieces and better pawn structure.

However, the path that White chose in the game is also interesting.

28...♞ac8 29.♖d5† ♕f8 30.♞d1

Keymer exerts more pressure on the black pieces.

**30...♔e7?**

Black misses a golden chance to free himself.

He should have played:

30...e4!

Asking the f3-knight an awkward question.

31.♞xc6

White's best winning chance is to immediately take back his missing exchange. 31.♞d2 wouldn't help as the white pieces are momentarily uncoordinated and Black can continue with 31...♖c7, breaking the pin. White should probably choose: 32.♞xc6 (32.♞xe4 ♖b6! leads to a dynamically balanced situation. 33.♞c3? can be met with 33...♖f7! and the queens come off before the white knight makes it to d5.) 32...♖xc6 33.♖h5 ♔g8 Keeping only a slight edge.

31...♖xc6 32.♖xd6† ♖xd6 33.♞xd6 exf3 34.gxf3 ♖b8

With good drawing chances. When Tarrasch claimed "All rook endgames are drawn" he was not being unreasonable!

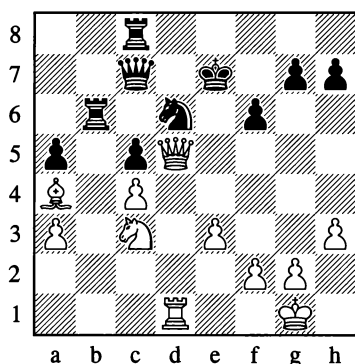
31.h3

White is in no rush since Black cannot escape the bind.

31...♖b7?

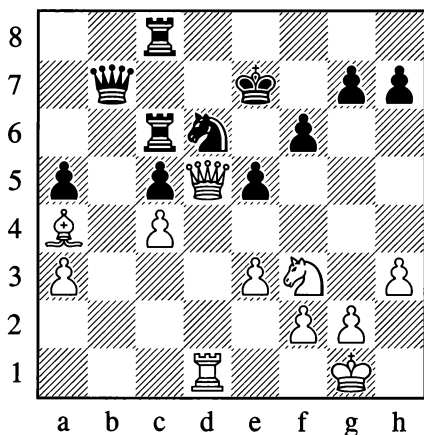
A mistake in a bad position.

Unlike on the previous move, 31...e4? doesn't work. After 32.♞d2 ♖c7 White has 33.♞xe4! and if 33...♖b6 then 34.♞c3! is extremely powerful.



Compared to the note on the previous move, Black is unable to play ... Wf7 . The white knight is going to land on d5 and the black kingside is terribly weak on the light squares. A sample line could be: 34... Gf8 35. Wd3! Wf7 36. De5 Bbb8 37. Wxh7 Dxc4 38. De7! Wxe7 39. Ed7 White wins.

31...g6 was Black's best chance but after 32.e4 he remains in a terrible bind.



32. De5!

White finds a brilliant way to end the game.

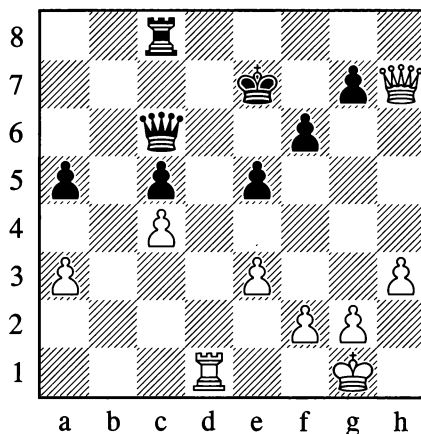
32... Wd7

The white knight is untouchable: 32...fxg5 33. Wxe5+ Gf7 (33... Gd7 34. Bxd6+ wins) 34. Gxc6 Bxc6 35. Bxd6 White is completely winning.

33. De4

The two pins have paralyzed Black.

33... Wc7 34. Gxc6 Dxe4 35. Wxe4 Wxc6
36. Wxh7



Finally, White's initiative bears fruit. He has an extra pawn and a crushing attack, and the rest is easy.

36... Gf7 37. Wf5

37.h4 with the idea of h5, would be another way to finish the game.

37...g6 38. Wg4 f5 39. Wh4 We6 40. Wh7+ Gf6 41. Ed7 Gg5 42.g3 Wxc4 43.f4+ exf4 44. Wh4#
1-0

An excellent performance by the youngest German to ever become a grandmaster. The activity of his pieces was so great compared to the opposing forces that Black had very few chances of getting back in the game.

Black's first chance was 23... Bab8! , sacrificing a pawn for the sake of activity. As we will demonstrate in the next segment of this chapter, that's also a common tool in our mission to seize the initiative. His second chance with 30...e4! features the same theme.

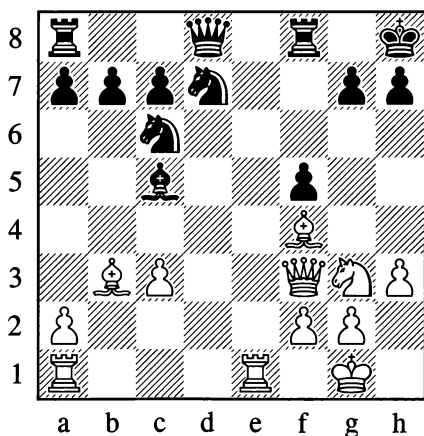
Again, Black should have sacrificed a pawn to activate his pieces. We already warned you with the title of this segment. Activity matters most!

In the next game, Black goes above and beyond for the activity of his pieces, ruining his king position but getting a powerful initiative.

Ian Nepomniachtchi – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Bucharest 2022

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.0-0 ♘f6
5.d3 0-0 6.c3 d5 7.exd5 ♘xd5 8.♞e1 ♙g4
9.♘bd2 ♘b6 10.h3 ♙h5 11.♙b3 ♖h8
12.♘e4 ♘d7 13.♘g3 ♙xf3 14.♞xf3 f5
15.d4 exd4 16.♙f4 dxc3 17.bxc3



Black has an extra pawn but White has a lead in development and the pair of bishops. If he gets another move he'll get fully mobilized with ♖ad1 and Black will be totally busted.

17...g5!

Black bravely seeks to wrest the initiative from his opponent. The f4-bishop is forced to abandon its active post and has a hard time choosing its next home.

18.♙e3

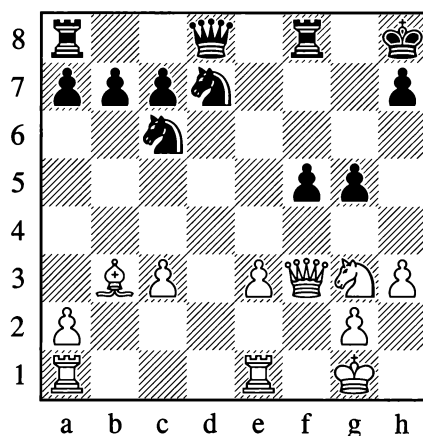
A sad necessity.

It doesn't help to retreat all the way back: 18.♙c1 ♘ce5 19.♞d1 (19.♞xb7 ♞f6! 20.♞d5 ♞ae8 gives Black a dangerous initiative.) 19...g4! Black gets a strong attack.

18.♙d2? is even worse due to 18...♘de5 when the bishop is in trouble on d2.

18...♙xe3 19.fxe3

Of course, not 19.♞xe3?? due to 19...f4 and Black wins.

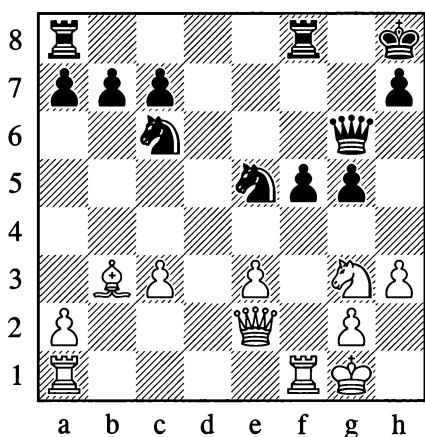


A complete transformation compared to our previous diagram. White's structure got compromised and, more importantly, the dark-squared bishops were exchanged, giving Black some superiority over the whole colour complex. Even though his shelter was compromised, the king feels safer on h8 and will be nicely protected by the queen when she lands on f6. The knights are going to start jumping on the dark squares using the safe e5-square.

19...♘de5 20.♞h5 ♞f6

Black covers his king and can safely go about increasing the pressure on the white weaknesses.

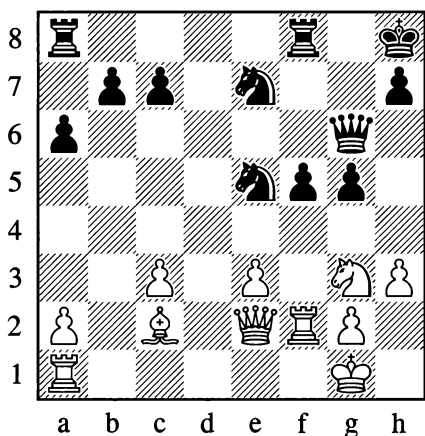
21.♞f1 ♞g6 22.♞e2



22...a6

Stronger was: 22...f4! 23.♙c2 (23.exf4 can be met with 23...gxf4 24.♘h1 f3 and Black's attack becomes irresistible.) 23...♙g8 24.♘e4 ♘c4 25.exf4 gxf4 With good attacking possibilities for Black.

23.♙c2 ♘e7 24.♙f2



24...♙f2!

Black hesitates a second time.

It was better to strike with:

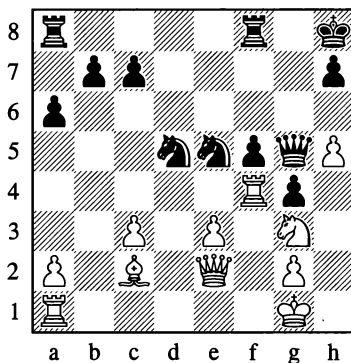
24...g4!

Trying to find a way for the black queen to infiltrate the white camp.

25.h4 ♙h6 26.h5 ♙g5!

The queen tries her utmost to wiggle her way in. The threat is ...♙h4.

27.♙f4 ♘d5



Black has created serious threats and it's hard for White to protect all his weaknesses. A sample line could continue:

28.♙af1 ♙ae8 29.♙xf5 ♙xf5 30.♙xf5

After 30.♘xf5?? ♘f3+! Black wins.

30...♙xe3+ 31.♙f2 b5

Black is a pawn up and remains slightly better.

25.♙af1 ♙af8 26.♙b3 ♙f6 27.♘h5 ♙d6 28.g4!?

Black is a pawn up, but the position is totally unclear.

...0-1

Black's prospects looked dire in the starting diagram but 17...g5! turned the situation around completely. The long-term problems caused by the advance of the g-pawn were insignificant compared to the activity gained by the black pieces and the importance of getting to exchange the dark-squared bishops.

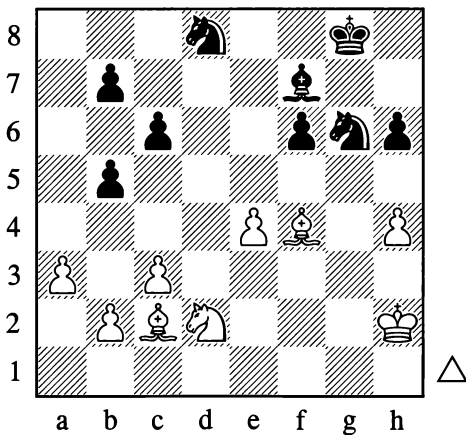
Even in endgames, we should not neglect the importance of having the initiative. Contrary to popular belief, the importance of piece activity increases in the game's later stages. Think about it this way: if one of your pieces

is passive in the middlegame, we have already emphasized enough how important it is to improve it. However, if all pieces are still on the board, this passive piece is only one out of seven (excluding the king) pieces that can be used as a tool. If you only have one or two pieces remaining, then a single passive piece accounts for a much larger proportion of your army.

Seizing the initiative in the endgame is one of the most effective and commonly used tools to convert an advantage or salvage an unfavourable situation to make a draw. The next game is an excellent example of gaining the initiative with limited material remaining.

Magnus Carlsen – Dmitry Andreikin

St Petersburg (rapid) 2018



Much like in the first example, White has the two-bishop advantage. He decides to transform it into something more concrete.

35.♔g3!

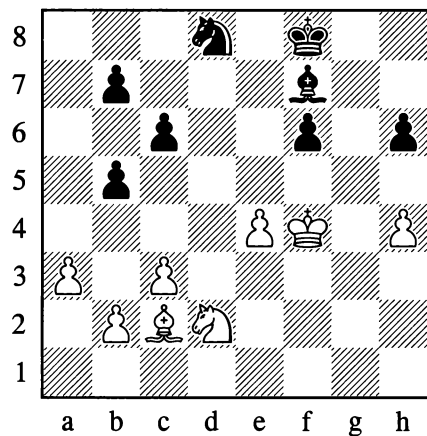
Giving up the bishop pair but activating the king.

In the event of 35.♔g3 ♖e6 36.♖f3 ♖c5 White retains a slight advantage thanks to his pair of bishops, but Black has excellent chances to hold. White will need to spend a lot of time to activate his king now that the bishop occupies the g3-square.

35...♖xf4

Of course, if Black had refused the trade White would eventually move the bishop from f4, meaning that he got to activate his king for free. For instance: 35...♔g7 36.♖f3 ♖e6 37.♔d6 h5 38.♖d4 With the white knight ready to set up shop on f5, Black's position seems to be hanging by a thread.

36.♔xf4 ♔f8



37.e5!

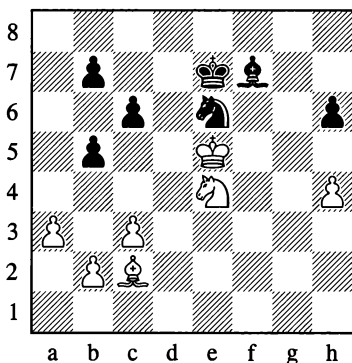
Carlsen clears the path for his king to enter the opponent's camp. This is the technique the legendary Mark Dvoretsky used to call "widening the beachhead".

37...♔e7 38.exf6† ♔xf6 39.♖e4† ♔e7 40.♖f2?

A mistake, missing the chance to gain further ground with the king. However, we must note that it is not easy to play such endgames with the required finesse under rapid time control.

White could have obtained a considerable advantage after:

40. ♖f5 ♜e6 41. ♖e5!



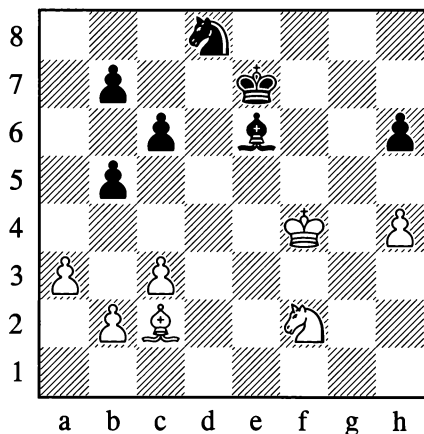
41... ♗g6

41... ♜f8 could be met by 42. ♜f6 with the idea of ♜g4, provoking his opponent into pushing the pawn to h5. Then both the pawn and the g5-square would become more vulnerable.

42. ♗b3 ♗xe4 43. ♗xe6

Black faces a difficult defensive task in the ensuing endgame. White's king is much more active than his counterpart and the black structure on the queenside is vulnerable.

40... ♗e6



41. ♗f5!

Carlsen wants to trade off Black's light-squared bishop to be able to access the light squares with his king. At the same time, he's banking on the activity of his two remaining pieces which seem much better placed than their counterparts.

41... ♜f7 42. ♜g4 h5?

A weakening move.

Stronger was:

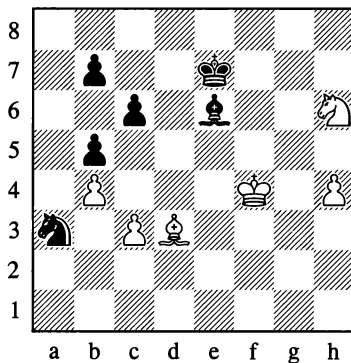
42... ♜d6!

Active defence is always the best choice.

43. ♜xh6 ♜c4

The black knight is active and will single-handedly save the game.

44. b4 ♜xa3 45. ♗d3

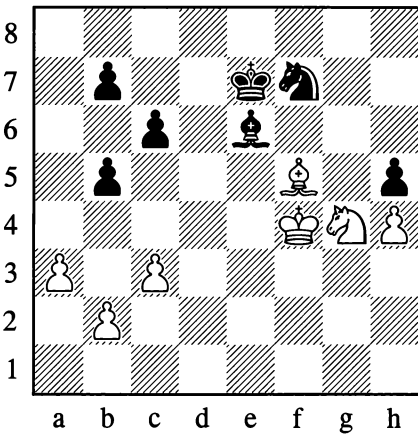


45... ♗a2!

Preparing ... ♗b1.

46. ♜f5† ♜f6 47. ♜d6 ♗b1 48. ♗f1 ♗a2

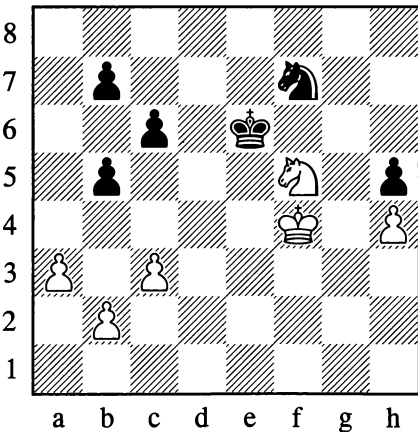
Black has good chances to hold.

**43...♔f6?!**

Preventing Black from playing ...♔f6 would be better: 43.♖f2! ♖d6 (After 43...♔f6?? 44.♖e4† ♔e7 45.♙xe6 ♔xe6 46.♖g5† ♖xg5 47.♔xg5 White wins easily.) 44.♙xe6 ♔xe6 45.♔g5 The h5-pawn falls.

43...♔f6

White's threat was ♙g6.

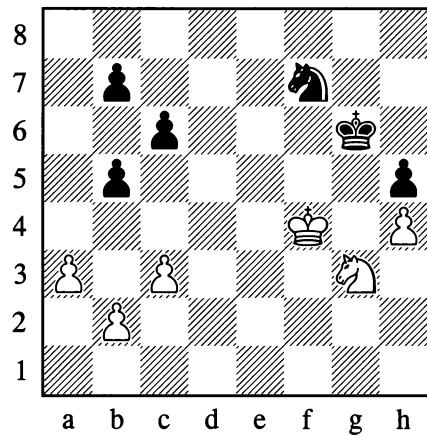
44.♙xe6 ♔xe6 45.♖f5**45...♔f6?**

45...♖e5 should have been played, trying to gain counterplay on the queenside: 46.♖g7† ♔d5 47.♖f5 (After 47.♖xh5 ♖g6† 48.♔g5 ♖xh4 49.♔xh4 ♔c4 50.♔g5 ♔b3 it's White who has to play for the draw.) 47...♔e6 Black has fully equalized.

46.♖g3 ♔g6?

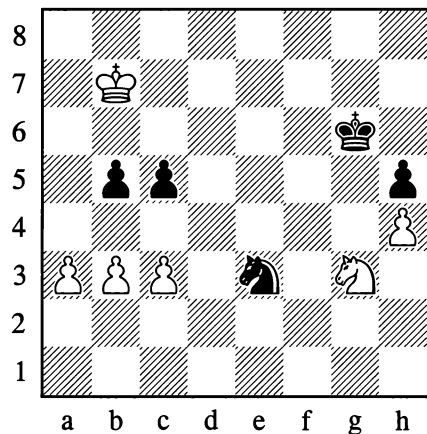
The last mistake.

After 46...♔e6! 47.♖xh5 ♖d6 Black could have obtained a draw with accurate play, for example: 48.b3 ♖f5 49.♔g4 ♖xh4! 50.♔xh4 ♔f5 Considering the distance of the white king from his pawns, the main battle is between the white knight and the black king. Black will make a comfortable draw.

**47.b3!**

Black is in a terrible zugzwang. His king and knight are forced into passive roles and cannot prevent White from penetrating the queenside.

47...♖h6 48.♔e5 ♖g4† 49.♔d6 ♖e3 50.♔c7 c5 51.♔xb7



White is completely winning and the rest is easy for Carlsen.

51...c4 52.b4 ♖d1 53.♗e2 ♜f5 54.♙c6
 ♜g4 55.♙xb5 ♜xh4 56.a4 ♜g4 57.a5 ♗e3
 58.a6 ♗d5 59.a7 h4 60.♙c6 h3 61.a8=♚
 1–0

Please note that this game was played in a rapid format, and it is only natural for players to not be so accurate. In endgames where knights are present, calculation is more important than knowledge, and calculating takes time.

As we saw, both sides had to play as actively as they possibly could. White needed to do so to get winning chances; Black to survive. It's interesting to note that Black's chances to save the game were all based around the same thing: surrendering a pawn for the sake of activity. This brings us nicely into our next segment.

The Initiative is worth more than a Pawn

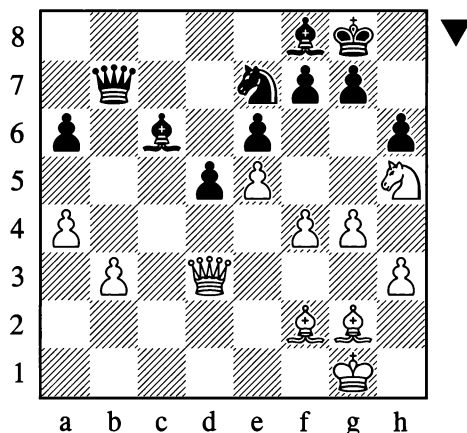
It's impossible to quantify something intangible like the initiative, but people are practical beings. So, as a general guideline, our advice would be: "Always go for a pawn sacrifice if it means seizing the initiative!"

Obviously there are times in chess when pawn sacrifices do not work, so we expect you to apply some common sense, rather than throwing away pawns at every opportunity. It is our observation that most players overestimate material and undervalue the initiative, which is why we recommend leaning the other way. A less sensationalist way of expressing our advice would be: "If, after scrutinizing a possible pawn sacrifice, you are still not sure if it's the best way to play, it's probably better to err on the side of gaining the initiative at the expense of a pawn, rather than the other way round."

A player who has made a habit of chucking pawns left and right if it means activating his pieces is none other than our usual suspect, Magnus Carlsen.

David Howell – Magnus Carlsen

London 2010



34...d4!

Carlsen sacrifices his d5-pawn to exchange White's light-squared bishop, a key defender of his king. If the opponent avoids the exchange, Black seizes a huge initiative along the h1-a8 diagonal.

35.♗f1

The exchange of bishops would lead to a clear advantage for Black: 35.♗xc6 ♗xc6 36.♗e1 ♗c5 White's attack isn't leading anywhere. The advance of his pawns on the kingside has merely led to the weakening of his king position. At the same time, due to the immobility of the white queenside pawns, Black can count on his passed d-pawn to give him a safe advantage, with White having little to no counterplay.

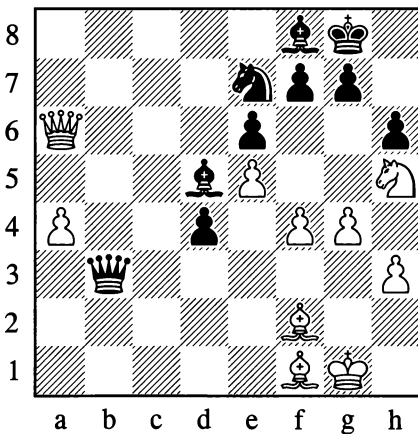
35...♗d5!

Hitting the b3-pawn and vacating the c6-square for the knight.

36. ♖xa6

Understandably, White wants to exchange as many pawns as possible so that his pieces can concentrate on the defensive task around his king. On the other hand, as we shall see, even the four-against-four situation on the kingside is not at all pleasant for him.

36. ♙xd4 would be slightly better, although after 36... ♖g6! intending ... ♖h4, Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn. (In the event of 36... ♙xb3 37. ♖xa6 ♖b4 38. ♙f2 ♙xa4 39. ♖c4 White is close to achieving complete equality.)

36... ♖xb3**37. ♖d3**

37. ♙xd4? was bad: 37... ♖c6 38. ♙b6 (After 38. ♙f2 ♖f3 Black wins.) 38... ♙e7! Black is threatening ...g7-g6 among other things, with a ferocious attack.

37... ♖xa4 38. ♖xd4

White managed to eliminate all the queenside pawns but his king position remains seriously compromised.

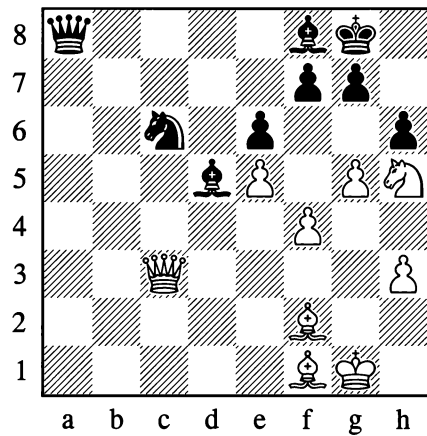
38... ♖a8

Black of course refrains from the exchange of queens.

39. ♖a7 ♖c8 40. ♖c5 ♖c6 41. ♖c3 ♖a8 42. g5?

A weakening move that makes Black's task much easier.

42. ♖h2 was a better option.

**42... ♖a4!**

Threatening a lethal queen-and-bishop battery with ... ♖e4.

43. ♖g3?

White's position was bad anyway, but this is the decisive mistake.

43. gxf6 was a better try but after 43... ♖e4 44. ♖g3 ♖xf4 45. hxf6 ♙xg7 the e5-pawn falls, and Black's advantage is close to decisive.

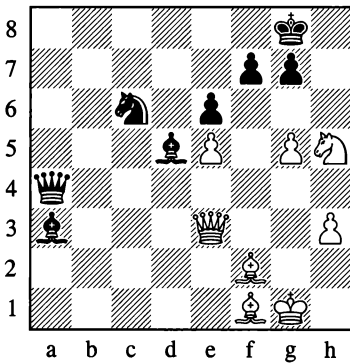
Another better option was:

43. ♖e3 hxf6

43... ♖d1 is less critical: 44. ♖e2! ♖xe2 45. ♙xe2 hxf6 46. fxf6 ♖xe5 47. ♖f4 White has some chances to save the game.

44. fxf6 ♙a3

The threat of ... ♙b2 is hard to meet.



45. d4 ♔c5! 46. ♖xc5 ♗xf4 47. ♗e3 ♖a4!

White's position remains difficult. The pawns can never move backwards!

43... ♗d1!

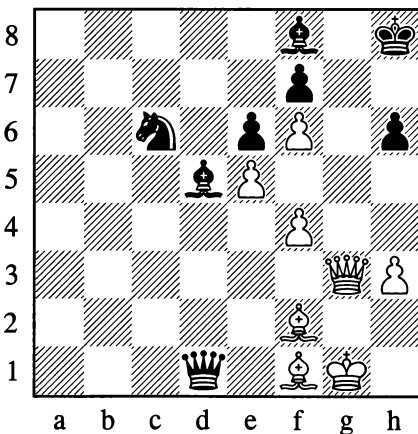
White's knight on h5 is hanging and does not escape Carlsen's eagle vision.

43... ♖d4!? is also winning.

44. ♖f6†

After 44. ♖h4 ♔c4 45. ♖g3 ♖d4 Black brings every piece to the attack and White is completely helpless.

44... ♗xf6 45. ♗xf6 ♔h8



White has no threats.

46. ♗d3 ♗xd3 47. ♔xd3 ♖b4

Black is a piece up and White has nothing for it other than a measly doubled pawn. The game continued for a few moves but to no avail.

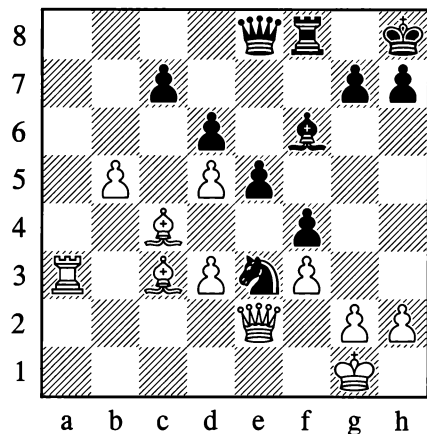
...0-1

Carlsen's opponent was so afraid of dealing with Black's initiative (and rightly so!) that he gave back his extra pawn instantly to exchange as many pieces as possible. His efforts fell short, as the remaining pieces were plenty for Black to mount a strong attack even with only four pawns for each player on the same side.

Let's move on to a "true" pawn sacrifice. In the next, famous example, Carlsen gives up a pawn without expecting to ever get it back. His main purpose is to exchange his bad bishop for the opponent's good one and enter a "duel".

Sergey Karjakin – Magnus Carlsen

New York (rapid 3) 2016



30... e4!

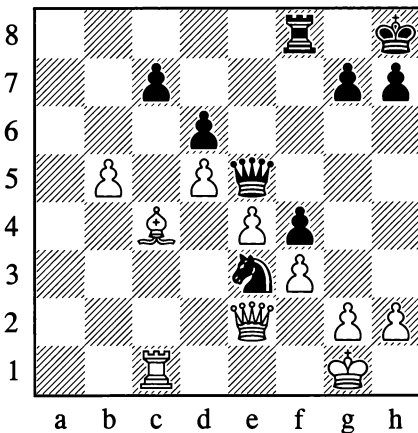
This strong pawn sacrifice is actually not easy for engines to find. Carlsen trades off his bad bishop for the opponent's good one, strengthens his knight on e3, opens the e5-square and the a1-h8 diagonal for his queen,

and enters a position with a good knight versus a bad bishop. The opponent getting to “repair” his structure is irrelevant. Black is going to launch an all-out attack.

31.dxe4 ♟xc3 32.♞xc3 ♞e5 33.♞c1?!

The game ends immediately after 33.♞a3?? as it can be met with 33...♞d4 and Black wins.

33.♞d2 is White’s best try: 33...♞a8 34.♟e2 ♞a1† 35.♞c1 The engine claims equality but, especially in a rapid game, it is much easier to play with Black.



33...♞a8

Carlsen activates his rook, which is logical enough.

It would have been even better for Black to play 33...♞d4! preventing White from playing ♞d2. After 34.♟h1 ♞a8 Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn deficit.

34.h3?!

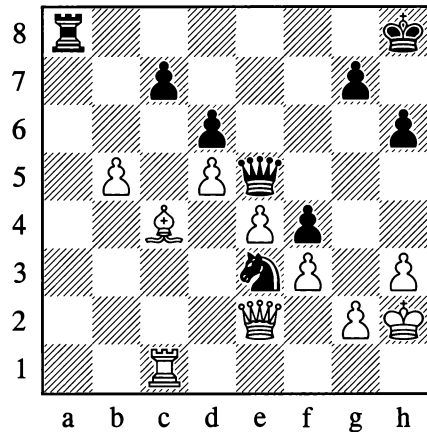
Again, 34.♞d2 would have been better: 34...h6 35.♟e2 It is hard for Black to make progress.

34...h6

34...♞d4! was again strongest.

35.♟h2

This was the last chance for White to play 35.♞d2!. The rapid time limit is the most likely reason why both of these great players were slightly inaccurate over the past few moves.



35...♞d4

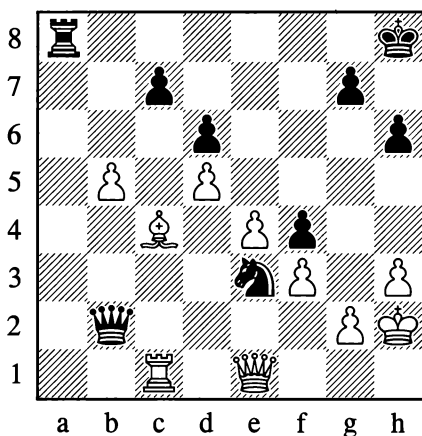
Carlsen finally infiltrates with his queen.

36.♞e1?!

Karjakin misses a golden opportunity. He should have taken a page out of his opponent’s playbook and activated his pieces by returning the pawn: 36.e5! ♞xe5 37.♟d3! With counterplay. White manages to put pressure on the c7-pawn, finds the e4-square for his bishop to finally be protected by a pawn, and opens the b1-h7 diagonal for a potential attack against the black king.

36...♞b2

Black threatens checkmate on g2, and White has no comfortable way to deal with that threat. Returning the bishop to f1 allows the rook to enter on the second rank, and every other move is unnatural.



37.♙f1?

Karjakin plays the normal move and it turns out to be the decisive mistake.

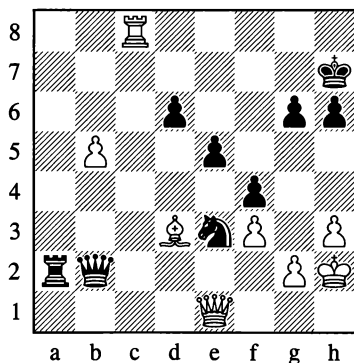
The only way to save the game was:

37.♙e2! ♞a2 38.e5!!

Finding this solution would have been borderline impossible, even in a game with classical time control. Still, once you see the idea, the logic is crystal clear: seize the initiative at all costs! Three different captures need to be examined:

a) 38...dxe5

This is met by a miraculous sequence:
39.d6! cxd6 40.♞c8† ♕h7 41.♙d3† g6



42.♞c2!!

A brilliant tactical resource, created by the newborn activity of the white pieces.

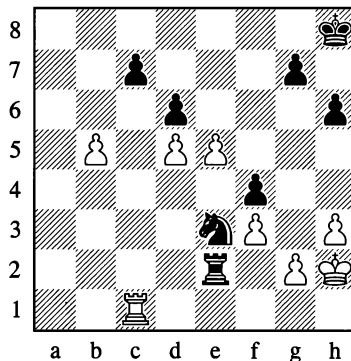
42...♞b3

After 42...♞xc2?? 43.♞e4 Black can't parry the opponent's mating threats.

43.♞h4! ♞xc2 44.♞e7†

With a draw.

b) 38...♞xe2 39.♞xe2 ♞xe2



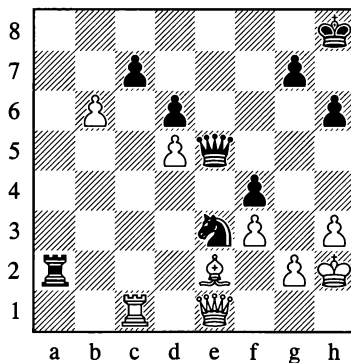
It looks as if everything is over, but White has prepared yet another miraculous escape:
40.b6! cxb6 41.exd6 ♞xg2† 42.♕h1 ♞d2 43.d7

♞xd5 44.♞c8† ♕h7 45.d8=♞ ♞xd8 46.♞xd8

The game should end in a draw.

c) 38...♞xe5 39.b6!

The key move in almost every variation. White needs to open the c-file for his rook!



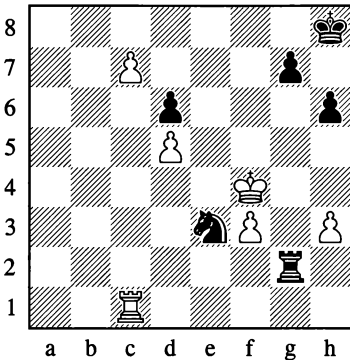
39...♞g5

Of course, not 39...cxb6?? due to 40.♞c8† ♕h7 41.♞b1† and White wins.

40.♞f2 ♞g3†!

Surprisingly, this is the only move to hold the balance for Black. Note how when lashing out trying to gain the initiative instead of defending passively, the defender might even gain winning chances of his own.

41. ♖xg3 fxg3† 42. ♕xg3 ♝xe2 43. bxc7 ♝xg2† 44. ♕f4



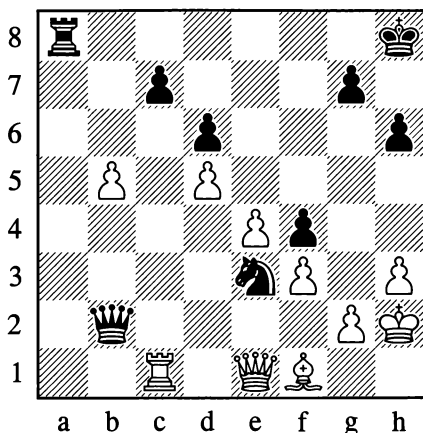
44... ♖xd5†

The black knight gives a fascinating performance, capturing the c7-pawn at the last second, but it is still not enough to win the game.

45. ♕e4 ♖xc7 46. ♝xc7

With his king and rook so active, it's easy for White to hold the draw.

After the passive move played in the game, White unfortunately lacks the above resources.



37... ♖a2 38. ♝xc7?

The final mistake.

White could have put up more resistance with 38. ♖b1 ♖f6 39. ♕e2 but Black keeps a decisive advantage after 39... ♖g5 40. ♖f2 ♖e5! 41. ♖e1 ♕h7! and White is completely tied up.

38... ♖a1

White must give up his queen for the black rook to avoid immediate checkmate.

0–1

A stellar performance by Carlsen, who by winning this game got within striking distance of retaining his World Champion title. By the way, this game could also have been included in Chapter 3, in the segment “Attacking on a Colour Complex”. The dark squares in the white camp were chronically ill.

To be able to make sacrifices like 30...e4! in your games, you need to visualize scenarios of different exchanges even if they're currently impossible to execute. For example, in the starting position of this example, one could imagine how the position would look without the dark-squared bishops. It's clear that the exchange favours Black, but you may think it is impossible to execute. Then, the only thing that remains is crossing the psychological barrier that prevents you from considering moves that give away material. After you do, it becomes clear that 30...e4! is an extremely powerful option.

Another useful visualization experiment is to imagine pathways through which your pieces can be improved without using the constraints of the current situation. In our case, the black queen was passive in the starting position, and it wasn't easy to find a path for her to infiltrate the white camp. Nevertheless, a clear one exists and Carlsen spectacularly showcased it in the game. If the queen reaches e5, then the a1-h8 diagonal

is hers for the taking and all the squares in this diagonal become possible infiltration points. What we're trying to get to is that even if the starting position was missing the dark-squared bishops, ...e4 could have still been an interesting try, simply to vacate the e5-square for the queen.

A whole book pretty much the size of this one could be written only featuring the theme of pawn sacrifices in Carlsen's games. If "that guy" is doing it all the time, then we all probably should. Once again, we'll repeat our guideline:

Always go for a pawn sacrifice if it means seizing the initiative!

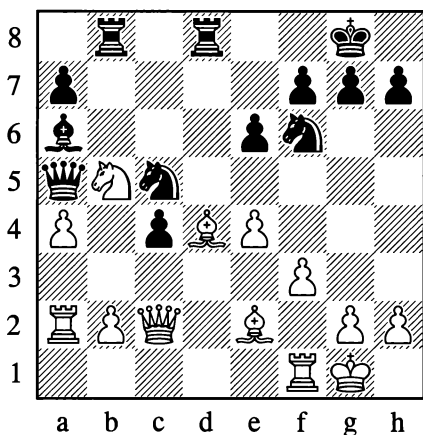
Exchanging your Opponent's Active Pieces

A common method of seizing the initiative is to exchange all your opponent's active pieces and leave them with only passive ones. This type of operation is usually quite forcing and might lead directly to an endgame, as in the following example.

Radoslaw Wojtaszek – Andrey Esipenko

Wijk aan Zee 2021

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.f3 d5 5.a3
♙e7 6.e4 dxc4 7.♙e3 b5 8.♘xb5 ♙a6 9.a4
c6 10.♘a3 ♙xa3 11.♙xa3 ♘bd7 12.♘e2 ♖b8
13.♙a2 0-0 14.♘c3 ♙a5 15.♙e2 ♖fd8 16.♙c2
c5 17.0-0 cxd4 18.♙xd4 ♘c5 19.♘b5



White has the pair of bishops and a healthy structure. However, the white piece placement is awkward and Esipenko is looking for a direct way to exploit that. The d4-bishop and the b5-knight are hanging. The a2-rook looks weird, and the king is exposed on the g1-a7 diagonal. If White is left with only his e2-bishop, that would underline the "wrong" placement of his pawns.

19...♙xd4!

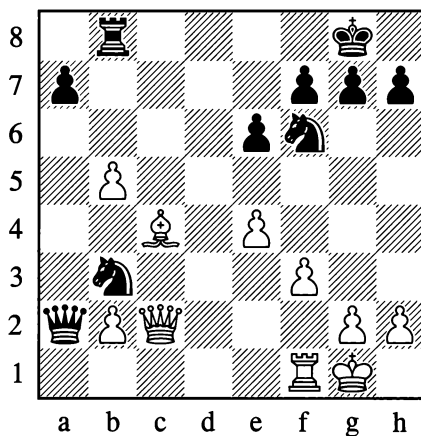
This temporary exchange sacrifice is a prelude to a series of exchanges that lead to Black seizing the initiative.

20.♘xd4 ♘b3! 21.♘b5

White must return the exchange and accept a worse position.

After 21.♙d1?? ♙c5 Black wins.

21...♙xb5 22.axb5 ♙xa2 23.♙xc4



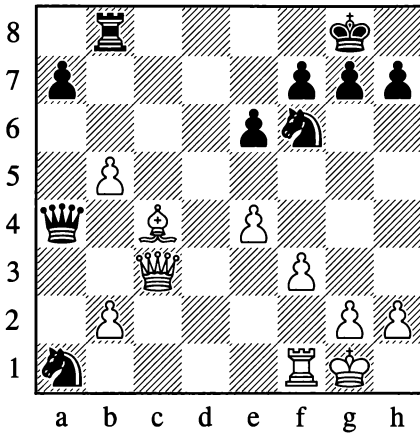
23...♘a1!?

This is much harder to handle than other, simpler tries.

23...♙a4 would seem normal but then a forced line follows: 24.♙xb3 ♙xb3 25.♙xb3 ♖xb5 26.♙d1 g5! A typical way of creating luft for the king, while gaining space and controlling squares at the same time. 27.♙c4 ♖xb2

28.e5 ♖h5 29.g3 White has good drawing chances, as the black knight isn't getting back any time soon.

24.♖c3 ♖a4

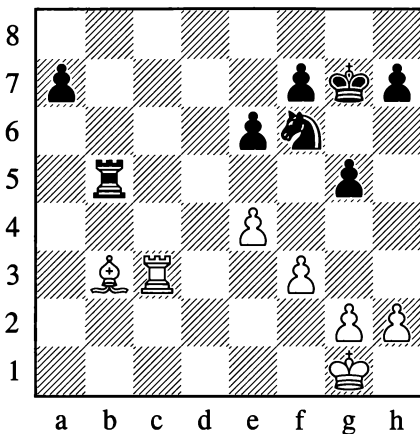


25.b3?

A mistake that costs White a pawn. He had surely anticipated how Black was going to react to this, so he was probably thinking there was nothing better.

25.♖b1! should have been played, preparing b2-b3. With the rook on the b-file, the b5-pawn does not fall. After 25...♗d8 26.b3 ♜xb3 27.♖xb3 ♖a5 28.♖e3 Black has only a slight edge.

25...♜xb3 26.♖xb3 ♖xb3 27.♗xb3 ♗xb5 28.♗c1 g5! 29.♗c3 ♕g7



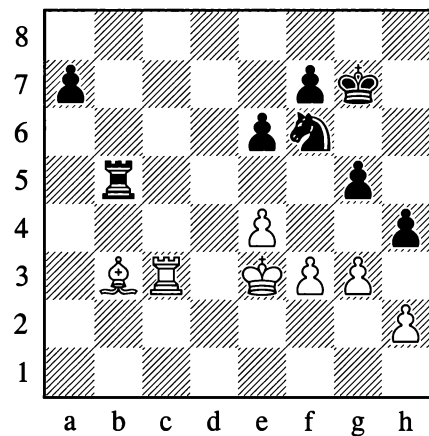
Black is a healthy pawn up and should win the game without too much trouble.

30.♕f2 h5! 31.♕e3 h4

Black makes maximum gains on the kingside. He is not going to win by queening his passed pawn; that is unrealistic. He is going to use it mostly as a diversion to win on the kingside. That is the principle of the two weaknesses in action!

32.g3

Weakening the dark squares even further with 32.h3 can be met by 32...♜h5 33.♗c4 ♗b2 34.♗f1 ♜f4 and Black is winning.



32...h3!

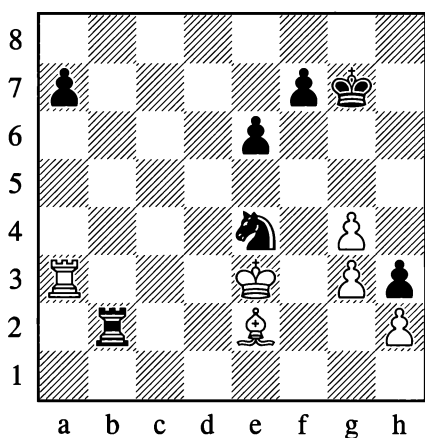
Fixing the weak h2-pawn.

33.♗d1 ♗b2 34.♗e2 g4!?

Esipenko finds a neat tactical solution to convert his advantage.

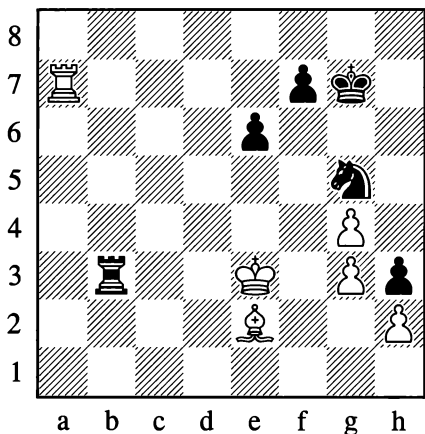
34...♗a2 and pushing the passed a-pawn would be simpler.

35.fxg4 ♜xe4 36.♗a3

**36...d5?**

This move lets White get back into the game, but it is still extremely hard to make it out alive.

36...f6! should have been played, activating the king. After 37.xa7 d3 38.f3 exh2, the h-pawn decides.

37.xa7 b3†**38.d4??**

In a position where it was hard to remain hopeful, White misses his chance.

He still had a narrow path to a holdable position with 38.d3! e5 39.a5! f6 40.d2 f3† 41.c2 b7 42.f1! and White barely survives.

38...b1

The h2-pawn is a goner and Black's set-up is rock solid. The game is over.

39.e3 h1 40.a5 f6 41.f3 exh2 42.a1 b2

Despite the inaccuracy on move 36, it was still a beautiful game by Andrey Esipenko, showcasing his technique and top-level positional understanding.

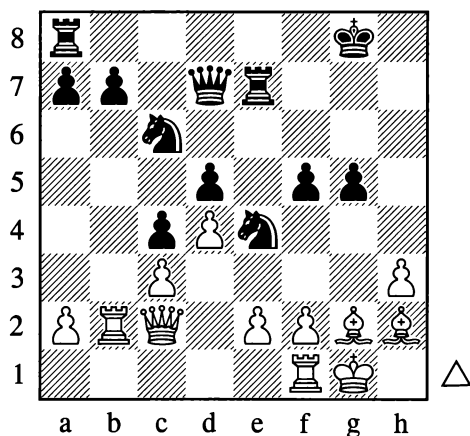
0–1

The operation that started with 19...xd4! led to all of White's active pieces disappearing and leaving him with only passive ones. This led to Black having a strong ongoing initiative that helped him steal an important pawn. A saving solution existed (25.b1!), but it was hard to spot. That's the case with most instances of trying to repel an initiative.

In the next example, Black's active pieces disappear, and his king is caught naked in the middle of a thunderstorm.

Anton Korobov – Adrien Demuth

Terme Catez 2022



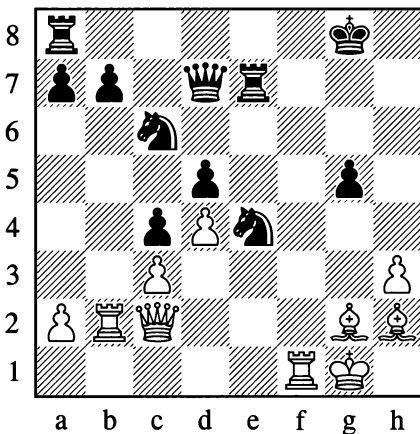
White has a bishop pair and the opponent's king is somewhat exposed. If only he could open the game...

22.f3!

Korobov prepares to blow the position wide open.

22...♟f6 23.e4!

A pawn sacrifice to open the game. White displays an excellent understanding of the position. A measly pawn doesn't mean much; gaining the initiative could mean everything!

23...fxe4 24.fxe4 ♟xe4**25.♙xe4!**

White gives up his bishop to remove a crucial defender of the black kingside. At the same time, he makes room for his queen and b2-rook to join the attack via the second rank.

25...♞xe4?

Black should have played: 25...dxe4 26.♞e2 ♞d5 27.a4 With the threat of ♞b5. 27...a6 28.♞h5 ♞h7 Of course, White's initiative is still menacing, but Black can hope for a stubborn defence.

26.♞g2!

The queen slides over to the kingside with tempo, making room for the b2-rook to join the attack from f2. If White keeps making threats at this rate, Black won't have the time to

bring his queenside pieces over to the defence of his king.

26...g4

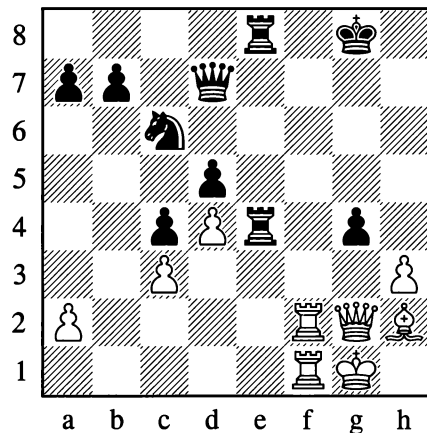
26...♟h8 wouldn't help: 27.♞bf2! ♞g8 28.♞f7 ♞e7 29.♞7f6! White refrains from unnecessary exchanges. 29...g4 30.h4 g3 31.♙xg3 ♞g4 32.♟h2 Black's out-of-play knight, his vulnerable king and White's active pieces guarantee a decisive advantage.

27.♞bf2

White mobilizes all his pieces. Black's king position is wildly precarious, and he will not be able to repel the opponent's attack. To do so, he would need all his forces to concentrate on the defensive effort, but White exchanged the main defender (the f6-knight) and left Black with a wayward rook on a8 and a useless knight on c6.

27...♞ae8?

27...♞h7 was a better try. However, after 28.hxg4 ♟e7 29.♞f3 ♟g6 30.♞f5 White's advantage is once again decisive.

**28.♞f5!**

A multipurpose move. White severs the connection between the black queen and the g4-pawn, threatens ♞g5†, and keeps a tab on the d5-pawn.

28...♖8e6

After 28...♖8e6 29.♖f8† ♔g7 30.♗f2 White wins.

29.♗f2

The game is over.

29...♘d8 30.♗g5†

His king is getting checkmated in the next few moves, so Black resigned.

30...♔h7 31.♗f5† ♔h8 32.♗h5† would be the end of the game if Black had decided to continue.

1–0

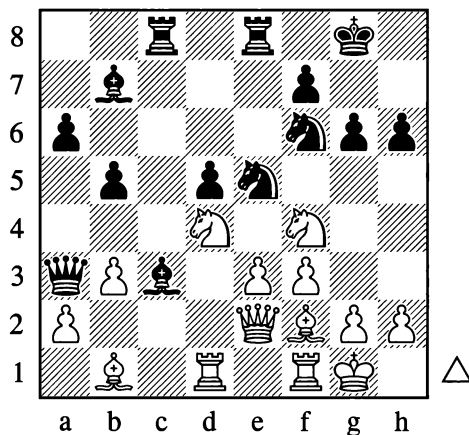
In the starting position of this example, Black had pushed his pawns on the kingside, but it didn't look like his king was in any serious danger. It was hard to imagine such a swift attack ending the game on the spot. Nevertheless, if you look at the position only a few moves later (after 25.♙xe4!) the weakness of His Majesty has become obvious.

What happened? Well, the position got blasted open, and an important defender of the black king got eliminated. White also got rid of his g2-bishop which was occupying a square the queen needed to quickly enter the attack. Black was left with a bunch of useless pieces regarding the attack against his king, and the rest was quite easy for a player of Korobov's calibre.

The previous example was tactical and straightforward. Let's see this concept in action in a more complicated strategic situation.

Arjun Erigaisi – Athanasios Mastrovasilis

Chennai (Olympiad) 2022



Black has a weak pawn on d5 and several weaknesses on the dark squares due to the placement of his pawns. His king position is also slightly compromised.

24.♙e1!

An excellent exchange by the young Indian star. Erigaisi is not afraid of the weakness of his e3-pawn. He highlights the dark-square weaknesses in the black camp by exchanging the dark-squared bishops. On top of that, the c3-bishop is by far Black's most active piece. Without it, it's not clear how the rest of them can coordinate.

24...♗e7 25.♔h1?!

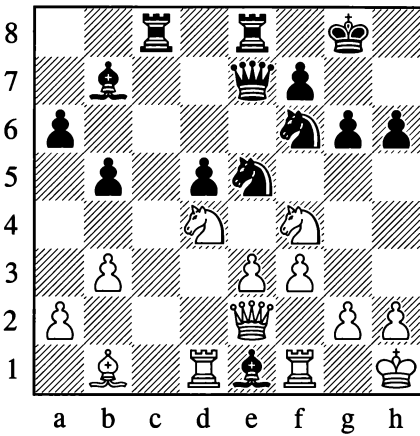
An unnecessary precaution.

Better was 25.♗f2 b4 26.♗g3 intending h2-h4, with a strong initiative.

The immediate 25.h4 is also worth considering.

25...♙xe1?

Black should have strengthened the position of his bishop on c3 and tried to get counterplay by attacking the e3-pawn. 25...b4! 26.♗f2 ♘c6 leads to a complicated battle.

**26. ♕xe1!**

The right recapture. The white queen controls many important squares and can quickly move to both wings.

26... ♖f8 27. h4 h5?!

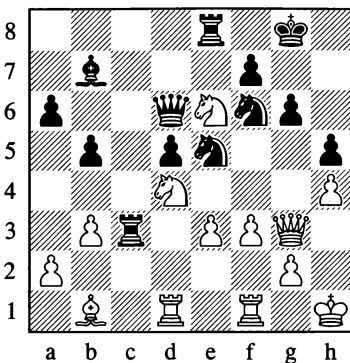
Black weakens his king's position even more and loses a tempo which could have been spent doing something far more constructive.

However, even after the better 27... ♖c6 there would follow 28. ♖g3 ♖xd4 29. exd4 ♖e3 30. ♖de1 ♖ce8 31. ♖xe3 ♖xe3 32. ♖c1 and White retains an advantage.

28. ♖g3 ♖g7?

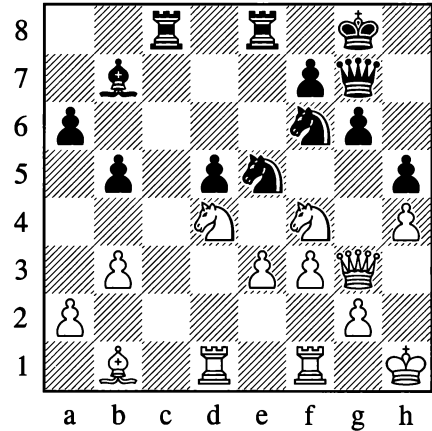
This is already a decisive mistake.

In the event of 28... ♖c3 White would have: 29. ♖fe6! ♖d6 (After 29... ♖xe6 30. ♖xe5 White is completely winning.)



30. ♖g7!! A magnificent strike. White uses the g7-square to transfer his knight to f5! 30... ♖d8 31. ♖gf5 ♖c7 32. ♖e2! ♖c6 33. ♖c1! White's initiative is decisive.

Instead, 28... ♖h8 should have been played, but Black's position looks scary anyway.

**29. ♖fe6!**

Taking a page out of our previous chapter, White makes a beneficial exchange that ruins the black kingside structure.

29... ♖xe6 30. ♖xe5

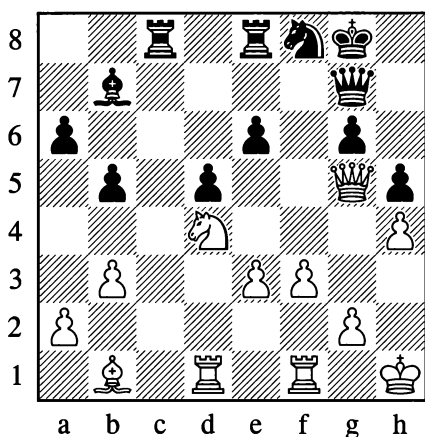
White has eliminated his opponent's pressure on the e3-pawn and riddled the black position with weaknesses all in one go.

30... ♖d7 31. ♖g5

Of course, White is not interested in exchanging queens; he wants to attack the enemy king.

31... ♖f8

31... e5 doesn't help: 32. ♖xg6 exd4 33. ♖xe8 ♖xg5 34. hxg5 ♖xe8 35. exd4 ♖f8 36. ♖c1 The black pieces are all over the place and the b7-bishop is especially terrible. White is completely winning.

**32.f4!**

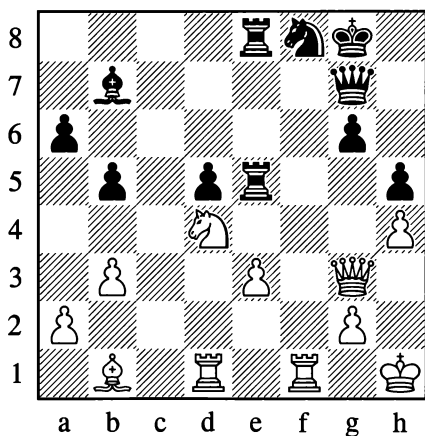
White puts another pawn on the opposite colour of his bishop and controls the vital e5-square.

32...e5

Black is justifiably trying to get some counterplay, but his position will not get any better.

33.fxe5 34.♖g3 ♜ce8

Black might have improved the activity of his rooks, but his terrible b7-bishop and the weakness of his king are still there.

**35.♞f1?**

Instead of using an active square to defend the e3-pawn, Arjun switches to passive defence

and gives the opponent a chance to obtain counterplay.

The natural 35.♞f3! ♠c8 36.♞dfl gave White a winning position.

35...♠c8?!

Black misses his chance.

After 35...♞5e7! 36.♞c1 ♞e5! White only has a slight advantage.

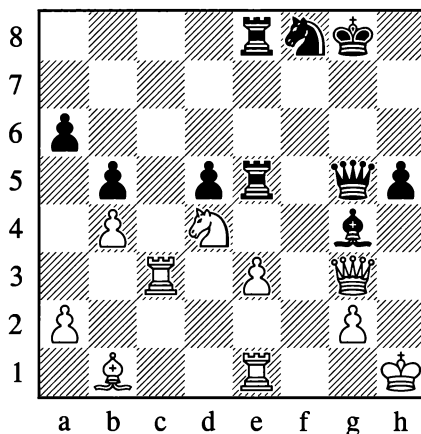
36.♞c1

36.♞c6 was also good: 36...♞5e6 37.♞b4 ♠b7 38.♞xd5 ♠xd5 39.♞xd5 White is a pawn up and can continue with an attack on the opponent's weak kingside.

36...♠g4 37.b4

Placing another pawn on the opposite colour of the bishops is perfectly correct from a positional point of view.

Nevertheless, there is a better, more active continuation: 37.♞c6! ♞5e7 38.♠c2 (Not 38.♞xa6? ♞xd4! 39.exd4 ♞xe1† 40.♠h2 ♞xb1 with counterplay.) 38...♞e6 39.♠h2! White has a great advantage due to the activity of his pieces.

37...g5 38.hxg5 ♞xg5 39.♞c3

Black has managed to activate his pieces quite a lot already.

39...♖5e7?

A crucial mistake.

After improving the worst-placed piece with 39...♘d7! the position would be unclear.

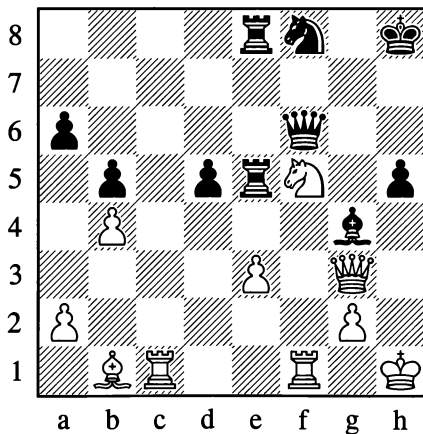
40.♙f5!

White takes the initiative yet again.

40...♞e5?!

40...♞e6 would be better, but mistakes like this are not uncommon on move 40.

41.♖f1 ♜f6 42.♞cc1 ♔h8



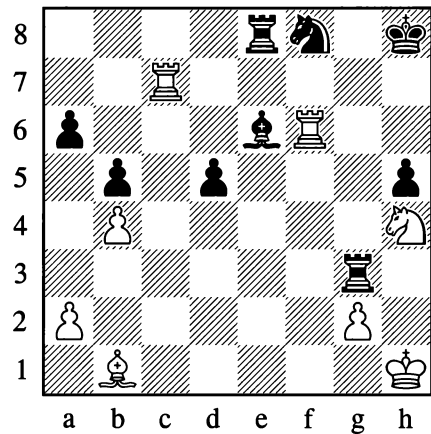
43.♘h4! ♞xe3

43...♗d6 would be a blunder due to 44.♞xf8! ♞xf8 45.♗xe5† ♗xe5 46.♘g6† and White wins.

44.♞xf6 ♞g3 45.♞c7 ♙e6?

The decisive mistake in an unpleasant position.

45...♙d7 should have been played, although after 46.♘g6† ♘g6 47.♞xd7 ♘f8 48.♞xd5 ♙g7 49.♞xa6 Black would still face an unenviable defensive task.



46.♘g6†!

White accurately calculates a forced win.

46...♙xg6 47.♙xg6 ♞c8 48.♞h7† ♔g8 49.♞a7!

Threatening ♞xe6 even if a rook was to protect the e6-bishop.

49...♙g4 50.♙f7† ♔h8 51.♙xd5

There is no defence against the mate threat of ♞h6.

1–0

An excellent game by the Indian rising star. Black's position only looked a bit clumsy at first, but after White managed to eliminate the c3-bishop and the e5-knight the black pieces gave a terrible impression. Forcing Black to recapture on e6 with a pawn and completely ruining his structure didn't hurt either. After the exchanges, the disparity in activity instantly became decisive.

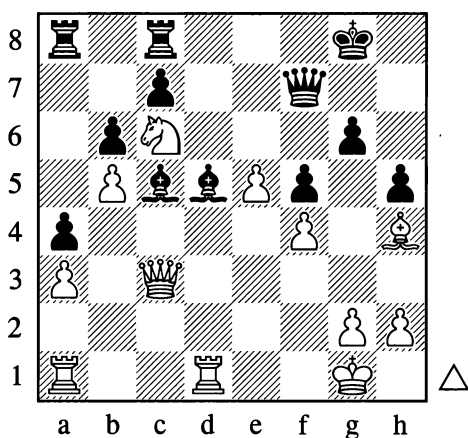
Players handling the initiative often have a problem similar to the one we discussed in Chapter 3, about the attacker wanting to keep pieces on the board and not realizing that removing some of the more important defenders can play a decisive role in the conversion of a dynamic superiority. You should always at least consider trades of this sort. They might just be the key to success.

Not all Activities are Created Equal

Even if we should always try to implement the worst-piece principle, there are cases where that's just impossible. In such cases, we need to decide which one among our pieces will be the one left out. When pondering a decision like this, the answer is usually quite simple: the weakest piece will have to be the one assigned a passive or a defensive task. The activity of a queen is more important when compared to the activity of a rook, and so on.

Amir Bagheri – Jonathan Dourerassou

Thorigny 2005



Black has the bishop pair, but exchanging one of them is not a good enough reason for White to part with his h4-bishop. The c5-bishop might look more menacing when compared to the one on h4 but, in reality, the white bishop on h4 paralyzes the opponent's pieces and prevents his rooks from being activated. In doing so, it single-handedly guarantees the advantage. One bishop killing the activity of two whole rooks is way too much difference in firepower.

26. ♕f2?

White should have kept his bishop on the board and played:

26. ♖h1!

Threatening to simply double on the d-file.

26... ♖f8

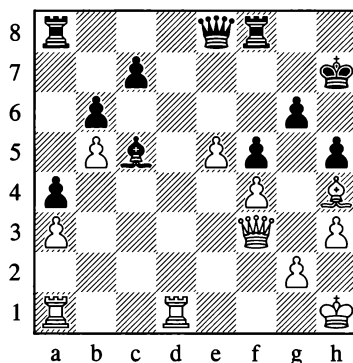
After 26... ♕c4 27. ♖d8! the queen can't keep a connection with the c4-bishop, so Black's reply is forced: 27... ♖xd8 28. ♕xd8 ♕xb5 29. ♖f3 ♖c8 30. ♖ac1 There isn't enough compensation for the exchange.

The most natural reaction seems to be 26... ♕xc6, removing the terribly strong c6-knight. However, after 27. bxc6 ♖b3 28. ♖e1! White threatens ♖d7, and due to the bishop controlling the d8-square and the queen protecting the a1-rook, Black has no way to prevent that. After the rook lands on the seventh rank, the black king is not long for this world. White is winning.

27. ♖g3

Threatening ♖xd5. A sample line is:

27... ♖h7 28. h3 ♖e6 29. ♖d4 ♖e8 30. ♖f3 ♕xf3 31. ♖xf3



Notice how the white bishop has continuously prevented the opponent's rooks from being activated by controlling the d8-square.

31... ♕e7

Black tries to exchange White's extremely annoying bishop at the first opportunity. If 31... ♖xb5, then 32. ♖d3! ♖f7 33. e6 ♖g7 34. ♕f6 and White wins.

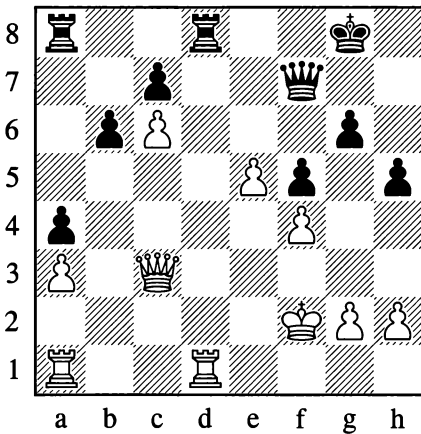
32.♙xe7 ♜xe7 33.♞ac1

White has a large advantage. He's essentially up a pawn since the c7-pawn is weak and not going anywhere, and the black king is still extremely weak.

26...♙xc6 27.bxc6 ♙xf2†

With two consecutive exchanges, Black has eliminated both pieces that used to control the d8-square. His rooks are back in the game.

28.♙xf2 ♞d8



Finally, the rook can contest the open file. The position is objectively almost equal, but it remains easier to play for White.

29.♞f3 ♞e7?

A decisive mistake that allows White to regain his advantage by tactical means. The queen shouldn't have left the a2-g8 diagonal.

29...h4 was one of the moves maintaining equality. If 30.♞d7, then Black can force a draw with: 30...♞xd7 31.cxd7 ♞d8 32.♞c6 ♞xd7 33.e6 ♞d2† 34.♙e1 ♞f6 35.♙xd2 ♞b2† 36.♙d3 ♞xa1 The white king is too open to avoid a perpetual.

30.♞d7! ♞xd7 31.cxd7

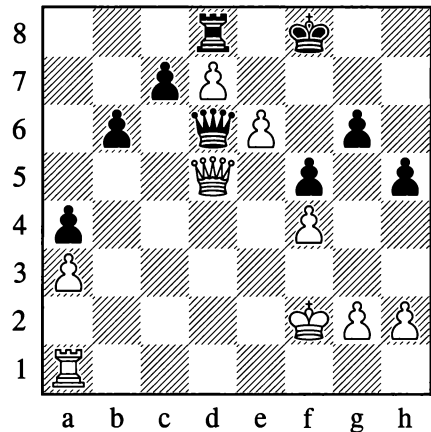
The black rook on a8 is hanging and the d7-pawn will be terribly strong if allowed to live another day.

31...♞d8 32.♞d5†

That's why abandoning the a2-g8 diagonal with 29...♞e7 was a mistake. White wins a vital tempo and the game is effectively over.

32...♙f8 33.e6 ♞d6

What else? With the queens on the board, the black king would eventually get checkmated.



34.♞xd6†!

A well-calculated, forcing solution. White wins by transitioning to a pawn endgame where his strong e6- and d7-pawn duo will eventually decide.

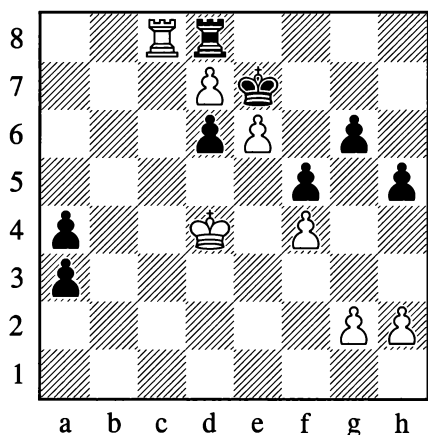
34...cxd6 35.♞c1! ♙e7 36.♞c8

The c8-rook freezes both black pieces in place.

36...b5 37.♙e3

White's king starts his journey.

37...b4 38.♙d4 bxa3



39.♔d5!

White had calculated everything well to the very end.

39...a2 40.♖xd8 ♔xd8 41.♔xd6

A cute finish.

1-0

An interesting game, featuring a nice moment (30.♖d7!) of exchanging to create a dangerous passer. However, the most instructive moment was White's mistake in the starting diagram. The "natural" 26.♕f2? was a big mistake that allowed Black back in the game from what was essentially a lost position. Keeping the h4-bishop in place with 26.♔h1! would leave Black with a "superior" bishop on c5, but the activity of that bishop matters very little compared to the activity of two whole rooks. Remember: not all activities are created equal!

Material is just another Positional Factor

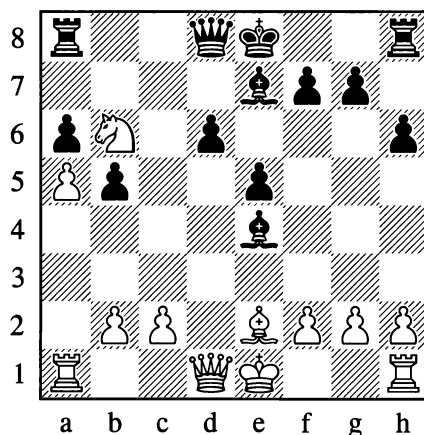
Have you ever wondered why minor pieces are "worth" three pawns, rooks are worth five and so on? Statistics lie firmly at the centre of the answer to this question. Those approximate figures tend to reflect the value of the pieces quite well, broadly speaking. But ultimately, they are just a guideline.

Many entire books have been devoted to the topics of material sacrifices and material imbalances. In this section, we will show some instructive examples relating to our topic of exchanges and the initiative.

Magnus Carlsen – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

Paris (rapid) 2017

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 a6 6.♙e2 e5 7.♘f3 ♙e7 8.♙g5 ♘bd7
9.a4 b6 10.♘d2 h6 11.♙xf6 ♘xf6 12.♘c4
♙b7 13.a5 b5 14.♘b6 ♘xe4 15.♘xe4 ♙xe4



White is a pawn down, but he can win an exchange. However, we should wonder: is the white knight on b6 actually weaker than the black rook on a8? Note that White has moved this knight six times in the first fifteen moves. Wouldn't it be a pity if so much time was spent with a piece that is exchanged immediately afterwards?

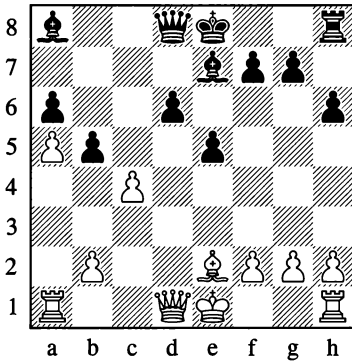
16.♙f3!?

Considering how Black is extremely weak on the light squares, Carlsen decides not to take the rook and instead exchanges the light-squared bishops to make the opponent's weaknesses more pronounced.

Being greedy would quickly backfire:

16. ♖xa8? ♗xa8 17. c4

After 17.0–0 d5 Black's central pawns and two bishops grant him more than enough compensation. The white rooks have no open files to work with.



17...d5!

Striking while the iron is hot.

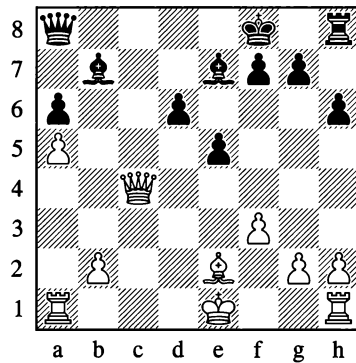
18. cxb5

18.cxd5 is met with 18...♗b4† 19.♕f1 ♗xd5 and Black gets a dangerous initiative.

18...♗b4† 19.♕f1 0–0 20.bxa6 d4

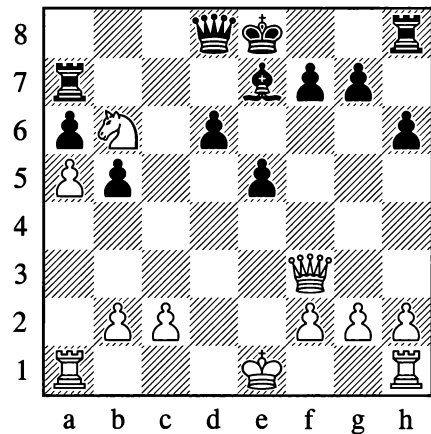
Black obtains a huge initiative due to his central pawns, his bishop pair and the opponent's king position.

However, White had an objectively even stronger continuation compared to the game: 16.c4! Trying to guarantee control of the d5-square while softening Black's structure and opening lines for the white major pieces. 16...bxc4 17.♗a4† ♕f8 18.f3! ♗b7 19.♖xa8 ♗xa8 20.♗xc4



It's difficult for Black to get enough compensation for the exchange because of his king's position and the open lines available to the white major pieces.

16...♗xf3 17.♗xf3 ♖a7



White's positional accomplishments are enough to justify the pawn deficit. His knight is much better than the bishop, and he has managed to restrain the opponent's central structure. Comparing the a7-rook with the b6-knight is another justification for White's choice to refrain from taking that rook.

18.c4!

A timely break, trying to seize the initiative.

18.♗c6† does not achieve anything special. After 18...♕f8 19.0–0 g6 20.c4 ♖c7 21.♗e4

bxc4 22.♖ac1 ♔g7, Black lost some time to castle by hand while White lost two tempos with his queen. It's not clear if either side benefited compared to the game.

18...d5!

Black correctly decides to return the pawn to free his bishop and check the white king before he is allowed to castle, thus forcing him to stay in the centre. This move is in line with MVL's style; trying to take the initiative at all costs is an integral part of his game.

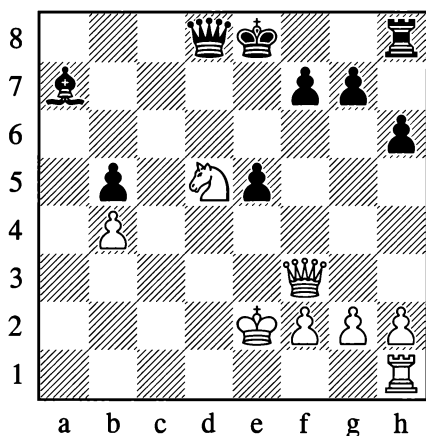
19.cxb5

19.cxd5? just loses a pawn to the simple 19...♙b4† 20.♔e2 0-0 21.♖hc1 ♕xa5 22.♖xa5 ♖xb6 when Black is clearly better.

19...♙b4† 20.♔e2 ♕xa5

Not necessary but not bad either.

21.♘xd5 axb5 22.b4 ♙b6 23.♖xa7 ♕xa7



24.♖a1

White is a pawn down and without castling rights. Nevertheless, the activity of his pieces guarantees the somewhat easier moves.

24...♙b8

But not 24...♙d4?? due to 25.♖a8! ♖xa8 26.♘c7† and White wins.

25.♖d3 0-0 26.♖xb5 e4

The position is objectively equal.

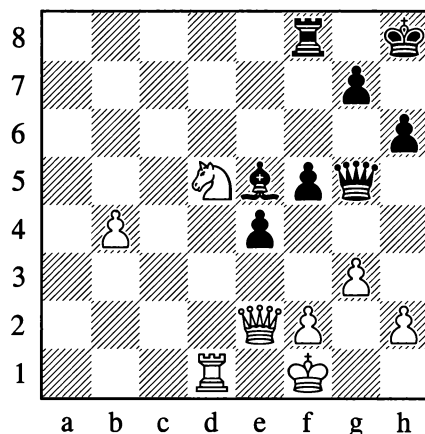
27.g3 ♙e5 28.♖d1 ♖g5 29.♔f1 f5 30.♖e2

Carlsen sets up a trap.

30...♔h8??

And Black walks right into it.

He could have kept the balance by simply moving the bishop with 30...♙b8.



31.f4!

You might think that this was easy and should not have been missed, but there is a psychological part to this equation. Black was pushing on the kingside, planning ...f5-f4 himself, and it is hard to imagine White can strike on the exact same square. Of course, this would have never been missed in a classical game but still, when a player like Maxime Vachier-Lagrave misses anything, it is quite instructive to think about why he missed it.

31...exf3 32.♖xe5

White is winning, and Magnus puts the game away without any trouble.

32...♖h5 33.♘f4 ♖xh2 34.♘g6† ♔h7 35.♘xf8† ♔h8 36.♘g6† ♔h7 37.♘h4 ♖h1† 38.♔f2 ♖xd1 39.♖xf5†

Black resigned.

1-0

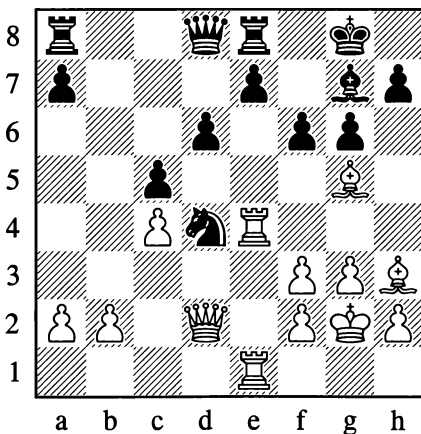
A high-class game by both sides that was eventually decided by a one-move blunder. The earlier portion was extremely instructive. Both players fought tooth and nail for the initiative, not backing down and not being afraid to sacrifice material when necessary. Most of all, we should again highlight Carlsen's choice on move 16. Picking up the exchange on offer was suicidal. His knight was more valuable than the a8-rook – at least in the short term.

Let's check out another example on the same topic:

Amir Bagheri – Kamran Shirazi

Thorigny 2005

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.c4 d6 4.♘c3 ♙f5 5.g3
♘e4 6.♘xe4 ♙xe4 7.♙h3 ♙g7 8.0-0 ♙c6
9.♙g5 0-0 10.♙d2 ♙xf3 11.exf3 ♘c6 12.d5
♘d4 13.♙g2 c5 14.dxc6 bxc6 15.♙ae1 ♙e8
16.♙e4 c5 17.♙fe1 f6?!



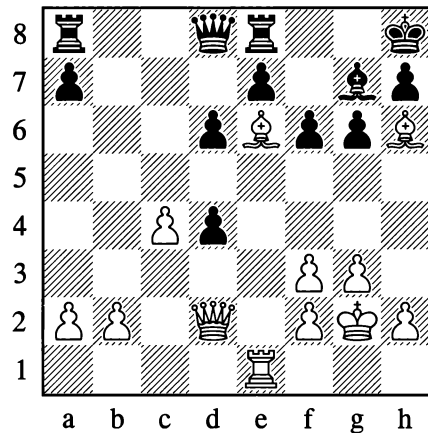
18.♙xd4!

An exchange sacrifice, trying to seize the initiative. In this specific case, the sacrifice is compulsory due to the power of Black's knight in the centre and the opponent's threat to strengthen it with ...e7-e5. Another key point is that White's bishop will gain access to the e6-square, blocking the e7-pawn and

smothering Black's entire position. Taken together, these factors mean that Black's knight is of far greater value than the rook being 'sacrificed.'

After 18.♙e3? e5! Black is already threatening ...f7-f5 and obtains a large advantage himself.

18...cxd4 19.♙e6† ♘h8 20.♙h6



20...♙xh6

Black correctly invites the white queen to h6, dragging her away from the centre and queenside.

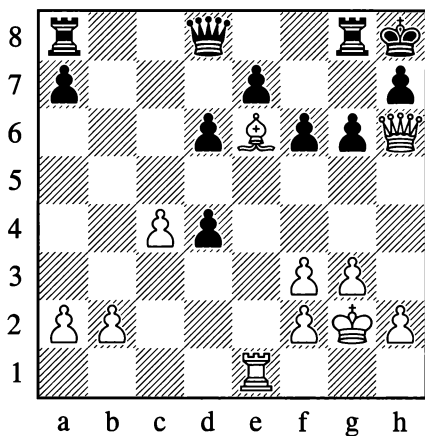
21.♙xh6 ♙g8?

The decisive mistake.

The white queen is close to the black king, creating the deadly threat of transferring his rook to h4. Black fails to counter the threat in the correct, active manner. One of the advantages of having the initiative is that it scares and misleads the opponent.

It was necessary for Black to play 21...♙a5! using the open fifth rank to bring his queen to the defence. The game should continue: 22.♙f7 ♙g5! 23.♙xg5 fxg5 24.♙e8 ♙xe8 25.♙e4 e5 26.f4 gxf4 27.gxf4 g5! The cleanest. White was threatening fxe5 and f2-f4.

28.fxg5 ♖g7 Black has enough compensation for the missing pawn.



22.♞e4!

White correctly refuses to take back the exchange and activates his rook. The bishop is stronger than the passive rook on g8.

22...♞g7 23.♞d2

The queen comes back to the centre.

23...f5 24.♞xd4

White has a huge advantage: his bishop is extremely powerful and his pieces are well coordinated. Black's rook on g7 is out of action and his king is quite weak. Add to these trumps White's mobile pawn majority on the queenside and we can confidently claim Black is busted. White eventually won the game on move 61.

...1-0

At first, it was the black d4-knight that was stronger than a rook. Then, it was the white bishop.

We chose to showcase two exchange sacrifices because they're by far the most common cases of a typically less valuable piece overpowering a more valuable one. However, do not let that restrict your imagination. Every kind of material sacrifice could be positionally justifiable.

The big takeaway from this segment should be that "quality" is more important than "quantity" when pondering exchanges. The common numerical values we assign to pieces are merely guidelines. In reality, material is just one of many positional factors in chess.

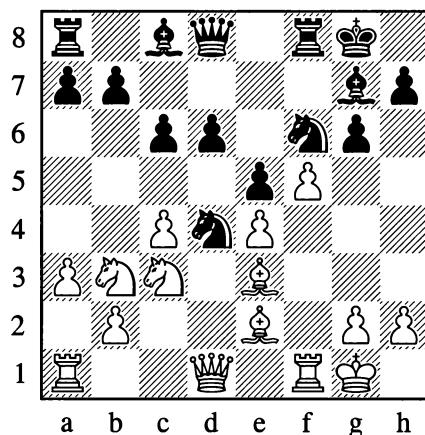
Mobile Pawn Centre

A mobile pawn centre is in many cases so strong that it single-handedly guarantees the initiative.

Fabiano Caruana – Magnus Carlsen

Baden-Baden 2018

1.d4 ♠f6 2.c4 g6 3.♠f3 ♠g7 4.e3 0-0 5.♠e2 d6 6.♠c3 ♠c6 7.d5 ♠b4 8.a3 ♠a6 9.♠d4 e5 10.dxe6 fxe6 11.0-0 e5 12.♠b3 c6 13.e4 ♠c7 14.f4 ♠e6 15.f5 ♠d4 16.♠e3



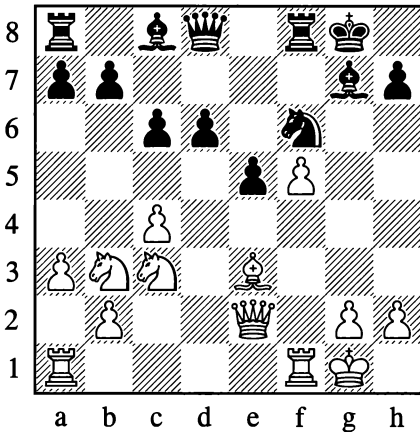
Black has a strong knight on d4, but it is currently under pressure. There are two options. Either solidify the position of the knight with ...c6-c5 or exchange it for one of the white minor pieces.

16...♠xe2!

Carlsen correctly parts with his powerful knight to obtain a mobile pawn centre. It's a much larger advantage compared to a pretty-looking piece.

Black achieves nothing after 16...c5 17.fxg6 hxg6 18.♗g5 and a white knight will land on d5.

17.♙xe2 gxf5 18.exf5



18...d5

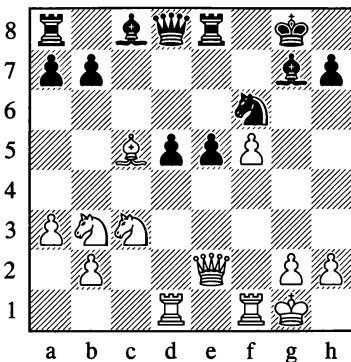
The point of the whole operation. Black gets a mighty central pawn duo.

19.cxd5 cxd5 20.♖ad1!?

In such a bad position even Caruana struggles to find a good defensive strategy.

He should have tried to deprive the black queen of the b6-square:

20.♗c5 ♜e8 21.♖ad1



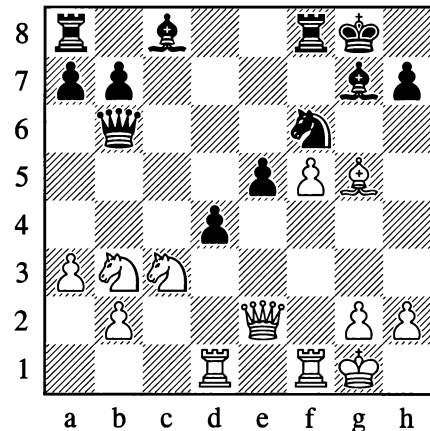
21...b6

After 21...d4 22.♗e4 ♗xe4 23.♙xe4 ♗f6 24.♖d3, White manages to blockade the black centre and the position is dynamically balanced.

22.♗e3 ♗b7 23.♗g5

Black has only a slight advantage.

20...d4 21.♗g5 ♙b6



The black queen is now activated, unpinning, having a look at the white king, and threatening the b3-knight. White is in a lot of trouble.

22.♙c4† ♖f7?!

There was no reason to self-pin.

The more natural 22...♖h8 was better.

23.♗a4

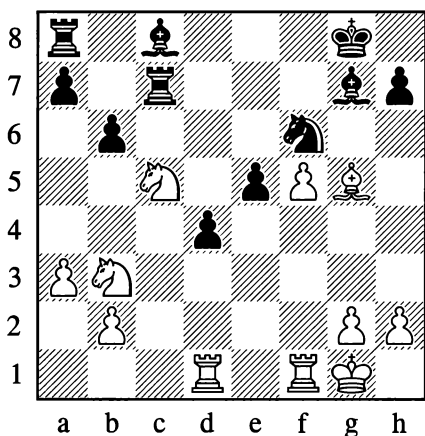
Forced.

23.♗d5? is bad: 23...♗xd5 24.♙xd5 ♗d7 25.♗d2 ♗c6 26.♙a2 d3† 27.♖h1 ♙d4 Black is winning.

23...♙c7

That's why Magnus chose to self-pin his rook on the previous move.

24.♙xc7 ♖xc7 25.♗ac5 b6

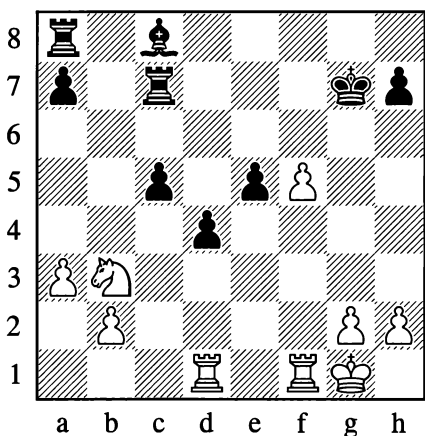
**26. ♖xf6?!**

White tries to force his way out of trouble, but there was no way of doing that.

26. ♘d3 was better, although after 26... ♖a6 27. ♖fe1 ♘d7 28. f6 ♖xd3 29. ♖xd3 ♖f8! Black retains a clear advantage.

26...bxc5

Of course, not 26... ♖xf6 27. ♘e4 and the e4-knight gives White good practical chances.

27. ♖xg7 ♖xg7**28. ♘d2?**

A mistake that leaves White with a totally lost position.

The lesser evil was 28. f6+ ♖f8! 29. ♖c1 c4 30. ♘d2 ♖a6 with a clear advantage for Black.

28...♖b7

Black's two connected passed pawns in the centre and his strong bishop on the long diagonal give him a winning position. Caruana put up a great fight though and, after some uncharacteristic inaccuracies by the world's greatest player, the game ultimately ended in a draw.

...½–½

The takeaway from this game is pretty straightforward: a mobile pawn centre is an advantage that can decide the game on its own. Exchanging a strong piece to get this type of advantage is a good trade. The initiative granted by the multitude of squares controlled and the power of the pawns to move forward as one massive unit can be devastating.

Opposite-Coloured Bishops

We've already briefly touched on the subject a couple of times, but the time has come to seriously occupy ourselves with an important topic: positions with bishops of opposite colours.

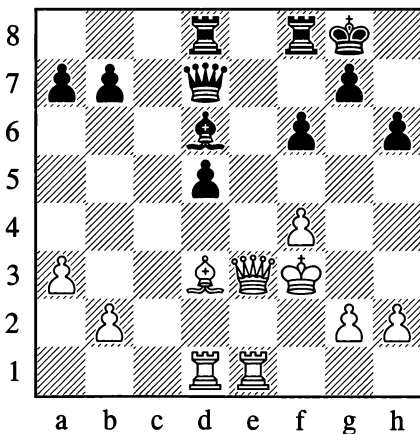
First off, let's address one of the most common misconceptions in all of chess. Positions with opposite-coloured bishops are not drawish! Only pure opposite-coloured bishop endgames should be considered as such. When accompanied by other pieces, opposite-coloured bishops can create some of the most double-edged situations imaginable.

We've already noted this before: attacking against the enemy king with opposite-coloured bishops feels like attacking with an extra piece. The opponent cannot defend against our threats on the colour complex of our extra bishop. Thus, seizing the initiative becomes more crucial than ever.

Magnus Carlsen – Wesley So

Wijk aan Zee 2018

1.♟f3 d5 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♙f4 ♙f5 4.e3 e6 5.c4
 ♙xb1 6.♖xb1 ♙b4† 7.♙d1 ♙d6 8.♙g5
 h6 9.♙xf6 ♖xf6 10.cxd5 exd5 11.e4 ♙e7
 12.♙b5† c6 13.e5 ♖f4 14.♙d3 c5 15.dxc5
 ♙c6 16.♖c1 ♖b4 17.a3 ♖xc5 18.♙e2
 ♙d4† 19.♙xd4 ♖xd4 20.f4 0–0 21.♖d2
 ♖b6 22.♙he1 f6 23.e6 ♖xe6† 24.♙f3 ♖d7
 25.♙ad1 ♙ad8 26.♖e3 ♙d6



Black has an extra pawn but his kingside is severely weakened on the light squares due to the terrible placement of his f- and h-pawns. On the other hand, White has almost all his pawns correctly placed on the colour of the opponent's bishop, controlling a fair share of dark squares.

27.♙g6!

Carlsen wants to underline the weakness of the kingside light squares, dominate the open e-file, and prepare the exchange of queens (taking a page from the previous chapter; the queen is the main defender). The presence of the bishop on g6 also prevents ...g7-g5, which would create the g7-square as a haven for the black king. Hence, White guarantees that Black will have an eternal problem with his back rank.

27...f5

Black tries to prepare ...♙f6.

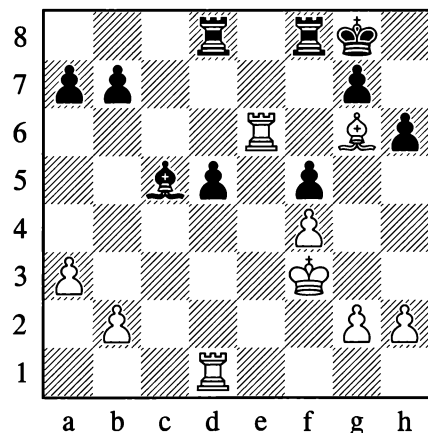
Another option was: 27...♙h8 28.♖e6! (After 28.♙xd5 Black could get some counterplay with 28...f5!.) 28...♖a4 (28...♖xe6 29.♙xe6 is similar to the game continuation. Black's pieces, and especially his king, are completely tied up.) 29.g3 White keeps the upper hand, planning to create a battery with his queen and bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal.

28.♖e6†!

An excellent decision. Carlsen is not afraid of exchanging queens because of his pawn deficit. The black queen is currently the only defender of the light squares. Without her, the weaknesses in Black's camp will feel a lot more pronounced.

28.♙xd5? is bad due to 28...♖c6 and Black obtains counterplay.

28...♖xe6 29.♙xe6 ♙c5



30.♙e5

Magnus recognizes a chance to regain the material plus interest without exchanging rooks.

30.h4!? with the idea of h4-h5, cementing the g6-bishop, would probably be even more annoying for Black to meet.

30...♖f6 31.♙xf5 ♕d6 32.♞dxd5 ♖f7
33.♞e4

Black can still try to maintain his position, but a pawn is always a pawn. Carlsen finally won the game on move 75.

...1-0

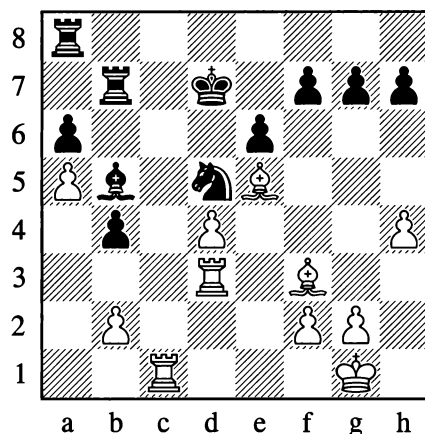
White took great advantage of Black's kingside weaknesses and used his initiative to not only take back his missing pawn but to actually win another one, claiming great winning chances in the resulting endgame. This is a good opportunity to repeat the title of a previous segment: the initiative is worth more than a pawn!

To anyone still thinking opposite-coloured bishops always mean an endgame is a draw, Carlsen's decision in the next example will come as an absolute shocker. Coincidentally, his victim is the same world-class player as before.

Magnus Carlsen – Wesley So

Internet (rapid) 2021

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 c5 5.e3
dxc4 6.♙xc4 a6 7.0-0 b5 8.♙e2 ♙b7 9.dxc5
♙xc5 10.♞xd8† ♖xd8 11.♘d2 ♖e7 12.♘b3
♘bd7 13.♞d1 ♙b6 14.a4 b4 15.a5 ♙a7
16.♘a4 ♙d5 17.♘d4 ♞hb8 18.♙d2 ♘c5
19.♘xc5 ♙xc5 20.♞ac1 ♙xd4 21.exd4 ♖d7
22.♙f4 ♞b7 23.h4 ♙b3 24.♞d3 ♙a4 25.♙e5
♙b5 26.♙f3 ♘d5



White has the two-bishop advantage, and his rooks are more active than their counterparts. Nevertheless, it doesn't look too easy to make progress.

27.♙xd5!

Carlsen once again improves his position with a proper exchange. His biggest problem was the black knight on d5 which held the black position together. Thanks to the activity of his rooks, White is guaranteed an advantage in the opposite-coloured bishop endgame.

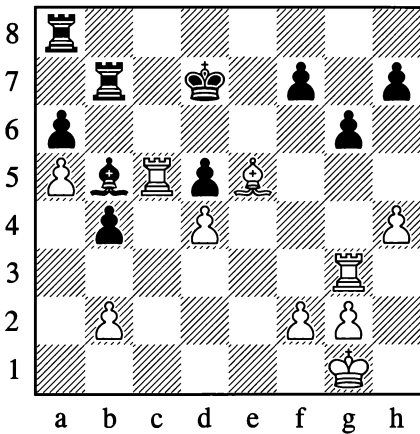
27...exd5 28.♞g3!

Provoking a weakness. Often, the question of who seizes the initiative is largely decided by the number of weaknesses in each camp.

28...g6

By placing another pawn on a light square, Black is becoming increasingly weak on the dark squares.

29.♞c5



29...♙c6?

Going passive is once again the decisive mistake.

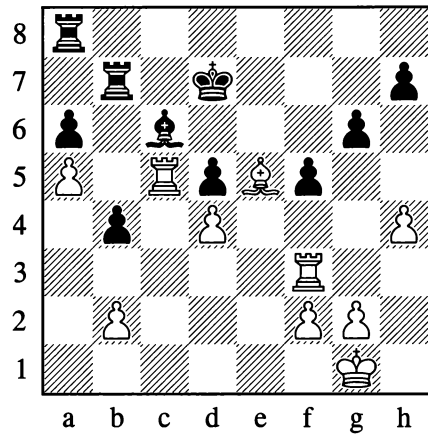
Black should have tried to get some counterplay by sacrificing the d5-pawn: 29...♙c8! 30.♙xd5† ♕e7 31.♙e3 ♙d7! A brave move. Black is not afraid of ghosts: there is no lethal discovered check. 32.♙d6† ♕d8 33.♙e7† ♕c7 34.♙xd7† ♕xd7 35.♙xb4 ♙e8 Despite being down two pawns, Black can continue fighting with high hopes for a draw due to the activity of his pieces.

Calculating this in a rapid game is verging on the limits of human abilities. Only his excellent intuition could have led So in that direction, but it's still unfair to demand such tenacity even from the best of the best. That only proves our point yet again. Seizing the initiative isn't only about the objective evaluation. It also gives us great practical chances and poses tough problems to our opponents.

30.♙f3!

Forcing yet another weakness.

30...f5



31.h5!

Carlsen prepares to open the h-file, opening a second front. When the opponent's pieces are restricted to passive defence on one side of the board, it's usually a good idea to ask some questions on the other side.

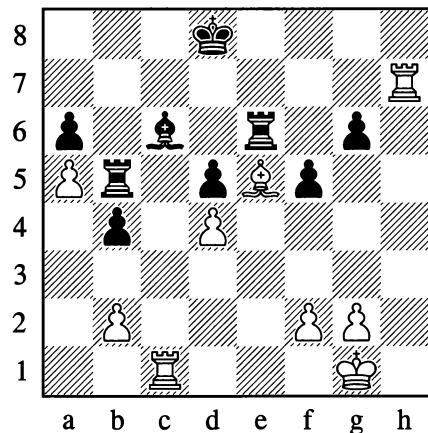
31...♙b5 32.♙c1!

It is clear that Carlsen should not accept the offer to exchange rooks. The activity of his rooks is the reason he has a winning advantage.

32...♙e8

32...♙xa5 can be met with 33.hxg6 hxg6 34.♙h3 and the exposed black king is caught in the middle. Black is helpless against the incoming onslaught.

33.hxg6 hxg6 34.♙h3 ♙e6 35.♙h7† ♕d8



36.b3!

Carlsen follows an instructive technical principle: "Don't be hasty!" Black is completely tied up.

36...g5 37.♙c7† ♜e8 38.♙b6

The black rook on b5 is completely out of play.

38...f4 39.♞g7

Black resigned. On top of the paralyzed rook on b5, his kingside pawns are starting to fall.

1–0

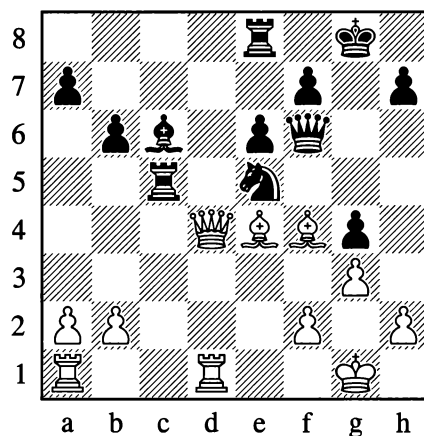
What a clean effort by Carlsen and in a rapid game no less! His energetic approach of creating as many weaknesses as possible in the opponent's camp aptly demonstrated why opposite-coloured bishops are so tightly bonded with fighting for the initiative.

In the next example, our role model has two winning options. Nevertheless, he knows that going for an opposite-coloured-bishops endgame while having the initiative is always good, and he goes for it.

Hikaru Nakamura – Magnus Carlsen

Moscow 2011

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♙a6 5.♞c2 ♙b4† 6.♙d2 ♙e7 7.♙g2 c6 8.0–0 d5 9.♘e5 ♘fd7 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♙f4 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 0–0 13.♞d1 ♙b7 14.♘d2 ♘c6 15.♘f3 g5 16.♙e3 g4 17.♘d4 ♘xe5 18.♙h6 ♞e8 19.e4 ♙c5 20.♘b3 ♞c8 21.♘xc5 ♞xc5 22.♞a4 ♙c6 23.♞d4 ♞f6 24.♙f4 dxe4 25.♙xe4

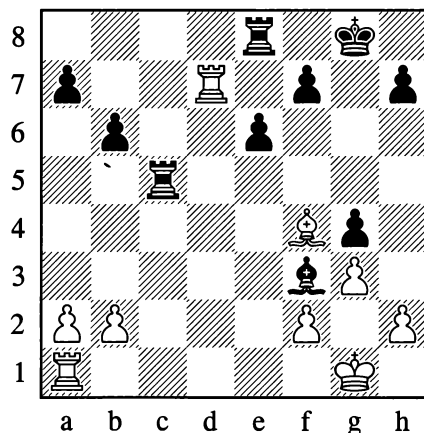
**25...♘f3†!**

The activity of Black's bishop and White's permanently weak king are going to be the telling factors.

The other option was 25...♙xe4! 26.♞xe4 ♘f3† 27.♘g2 ♞ec8 when Black's well-placed pieces and extra pawn guarantee a decisive advantage. However, to the human eye, the game solution seems much cleaner.

26.♙xf3 ♞xd4 27.♞xd4 ♙xf3

Much like in the previous examples, the defender can't do anything about the dominating bishop on f3.

28.♞d7

28...♖d5!

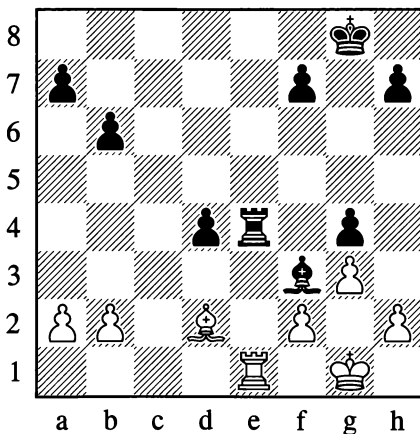
Exchanging White's only active piece.

29.♞xd5

29.♞xa7 ♞ed8 is obviously a disaster. Black couldn't do the same trick two moves ago with 28...♞ec8 because c1 is not a light square. Doubling on the d-file, on the other hand, is immediately lethal.

29...exd5 30.♙e3 ♞e4!

Carlsen activates his rook and intends to push his passed d5-pawn further down the board. It is sad for White that the d1-square is not available to his rook so there is no stopping Black's ongoing initiative.

31.♞e1 d4 32.♙d2**32...♞xe1†!**

A clean technical solution based on Black's important next move. It is not always easy to accept entering a pure opposite-coloured bishop endgame only one pawn up, but Magnus accurately calculates that this time Black is clearly winning.

33.♙xe1 ♙e2!

The key move, preventing White from bringing his king into action.

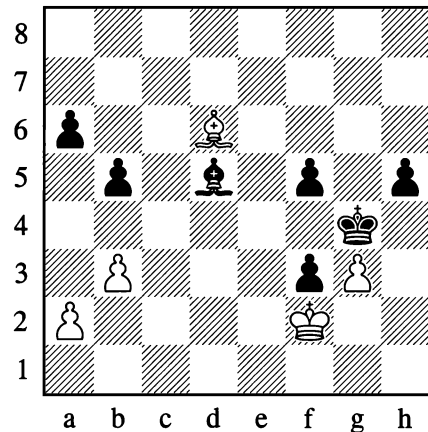
34.f4

What else? Without this move Black is playing with an extra piece.

34...gxf3 35.♙f2 d3

Black has managed to get two dangerous passed pawns instead of one. The technical conversion still requires some patience and skill, but Carlsen does not lack either of those attributes.

36.♙e1 ♖g7 37.♖f2 ♖f6 38.♖e3 ♖f5 39.h3 h5 40.♙d2 ♙f1 41.♙e1 ♙xh3 42.♖xd3 ♙f1† 43.♖e3 ♖g4 44.♖f2 ♙b5 45.♙c3 ♙c6 46.♙e5 b5 47.♙b8 a6 48.♙c7 f5 49.b3 ♙d5 50.♙d6

**50...f4!**

A cute breakthrough.

51.gxf4

Of course, 51.♙xf4 is met with 51...h4 and Black wins as the h-pawn is unstoppable.

51...h4 52.f5 ♖xf5 53.♖e3 ♖g4 54.♖f2 h3 55.♖e3 ♙e4! 56.♖f2 ♙b1 57.a3 ♙a2 58.b4 ♙f7!

Nakamura saw no hope and decided to resign.

A simple way to win with Black is to transfer the bishop to g4, protecting both passed pawns and freeing up the king to travel all the way to the queenside and pick up the a3-pawn. White could never take the bishop on g4 with his king, as then one of the two passers will inevitably queen, so there is absolutely no counterplay.

0–1

It was another instructive win by Carlsen using the initiative provided by his more active bishop and the weaknesses around the opponent's king.

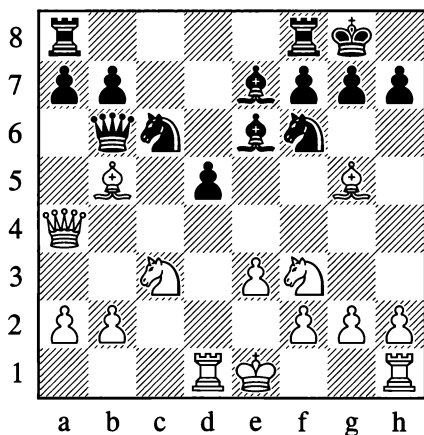
The same theme is featured in the next example, a masterpiece by the Polish star Jan-Krzysztof Duda that decided the final against Sergey Karjakin at the 2021 World Cup.

Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Sergey Karjakin

Krasnaya Polyana 2021

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 c5 5.cxd5 cxd4 6.♙xd4 exd5 7.♙g5 ♙e7 8.e3 0–0 9.♙d1 ♘c6 10.♙a4 ♙e6 11.♙b5 ♙b6?!

11...h6 12.♙h4 ♙c8 is a better option.



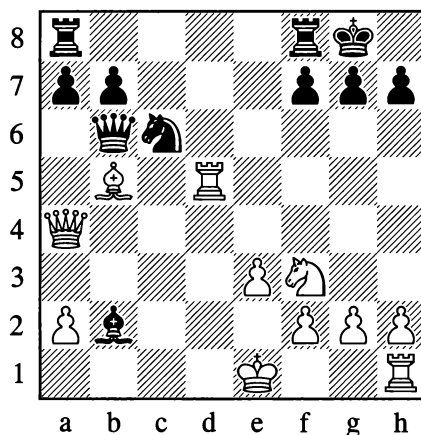
12.♙xf6!N

Probably a home-cooked improvement.

White decides to trade off his b2-pawn for the opponent's pawn on d5 and enter a position with opposite-coloured bishops. It might look harmless at first but, as we shall see, it enables White to pose some serious problems.

12.0–0 a6 13.♙xc6 bxc6 was equal in Giri – Wang Yue, Beijing 2011. Black has enough activity to support the hanging pawns.

12...♙xf6 13.♘xd5 ♙xd5 14.♙xd5 ♙xb2



The position White was aiming for. At first glance, Black has a solid position with no weaknesses. However, on further inspection some problems become apparent. Black's bishop lacks purpose as there are no targets to attack on the dark squares. On the other hand, the white bishop is tremendously useful. For the time being it puts some pressure on the c6-knight and limits Black's possibilities of pushing his pawn majority. Most importantly, there is a big target for this bishop to aim at: the f7-pawn.

15.♙e2!?

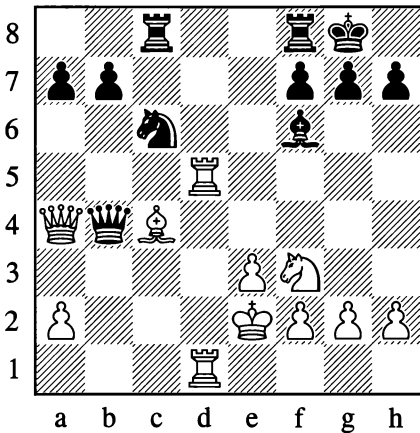
• An interesting decision. Duda claims that his king in the centre will not be in danger and anticipates the endgame after a future exchange of queens.

The engine is even happier with the more “normal” 15.0–0.

15...♙f6 16.♖hd1

All the white pieces are active and well-coordinated.

16...♜ac8 17.♙c4 ♜b4



18.♜b3!

The right square to exchange the queens on.

Of course, not 18.♜xb4?? ♘xb4 and White loses material.

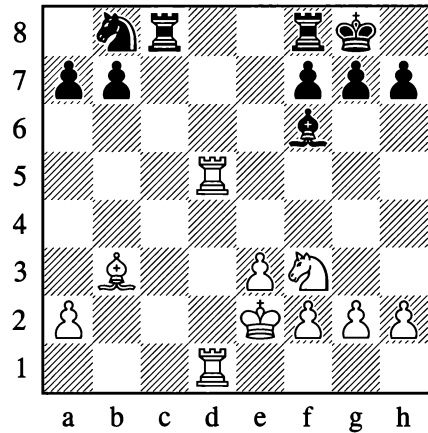
18...♜xb3 19.♙xb3

It is already clear that Duda's strategy was successful. The b3-bishop is a monster compared to the useless piece of wood standing on f6 and grants White a huge initiative.

19...♘b8

A passive retreat, trying to stop White from entering the seventh rank and targeting the f7-pawn with ♗d7.

Challenging White's control over the open file wasn't any better. 19...♗fd8 20.♗d7 ♗xd7 21.♗xd7 ♘d8 22.♘d4 White threatens both ♘f5 and ♘b5, in essence forcing 22...♙xd4, when there would follow: 23.exd4 ♖f8 24.♙a4! a6 25.d5 White has a huge advantage due to his passed d-pawn and better pieces.



20.g4!

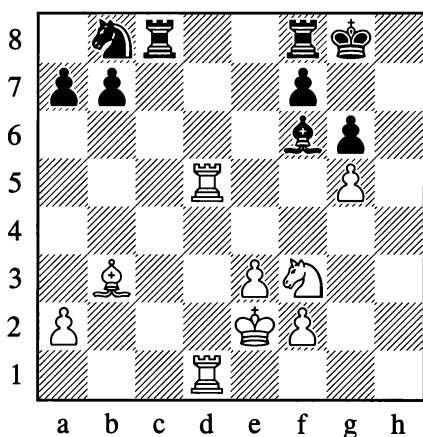
Duda grabs space on the kingside and provokes his opponent to create a new weakness. Furthermore, after driving the black bishop away from f6, the e5-square can be used by the white pieces.

20...h6

A questionable decision in an already bad position. Karjakin voluntarily weakens some of his light squares, increasing White's advantage.

After 20...g6 21.g5 ♙c3 22.h4 with the idea of h4-h5, White has a large initiative against absolutely no counterplay. However, this was still a lesser evil compared to the game continuation.

21.h4 g6 22.g5 hxg5 23.hxg5

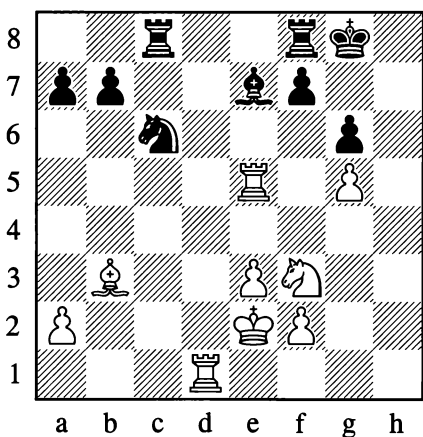
**23...♙e7**

Trying to keep the bishop on the a1-h8 diagonal doesn't help Black: 23...♙c3 24.♗h4! (24.♗h2 with the idea of ♗g4 is also strong.) 24...♔g7 25.f4 ♖h8 26.♗g2 With the threat of e3-e4 and f4-f5. White has a huge advantage.

24.♖e5!

This is a prelude to White's next, incredibly powerful move.

24.♗e5 is also interesting.

24...♗c6**25.♞d7!**

An excellent and well-calculated decision. Duda exploits the tactical possibilities of the position to further his positional gains. The rook is a monster on the seventh rank.

25...♙d8

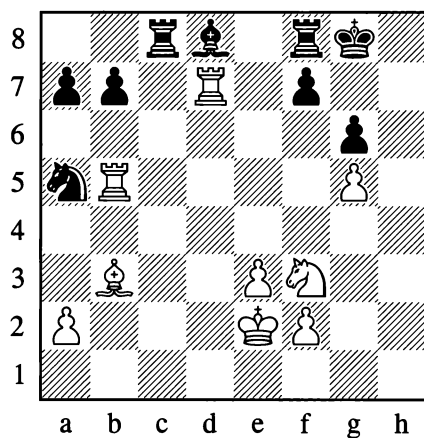
The critical line White had to calculate was: 25...♗xe5 26.♗xe5 ♙xg5 27.♗xg6 ♔g7 (After 27...♖fd8 28.♖xf7 White wins easily.) 28.♗xf8 ♖xf8 29.♖xb7 Black is busted. Another pawn will eventually fall.

26.♖b5!

Attacking the b7-pawn and clearing the e5-square for the knight.

26...♗a5

After 26...b6 27.♗e5 ♗xe5 28.♖xe5 ♔g7 29.♖ed5 ♙c7 30.♖e7 ♖fe8 31.♖dd7 ♖xe7 32.♖xe7 White is completely winning.

**27.♙d5!?**

Instead of immediately going for material gains, White wants to continue his domination and prepares to hit the f7-pawn again with ♗e5.

27.♖xd8 is also good enough.

27...♖c7

27...♔g7 28.♗d4 ♔g8 29.f4 is also hopeless.

28. ♖xf7!

A simple tactic.

28... ♖g7

After 28... ♖xf7 29. ♖xd8+ ♖g7 30. ♖xa5 White is a piece up.

29. ♖xc7 ♖xc7 30. ♖d5

Karjakin resigned. A magnificent display by the young Polish star and a deserved World Cup victory.

1–0

What we find remarkable about the examples in this segment is the clarity they radiate. In each case, the attacker methodically tore his opponent's positions apart, with the defender seeing little to no hope of survival. We hope that after seeing these examples, readers will never again make the mistake of assuming opposite-coloured bishops equate to a high probability of a draw. On the contrary, learning to yield the initiative provided by their presence is a valuable tool that will win you a tonne of attacking games. To conclude:

- 1) Stop being afraid of such transitions.
- 2) In positions with opposite-coloured bishops, the initiative is king.
- 3) The initiative often stems from the number of weaknesses in each player's camp, especially around their king.

Exchanging to Create an Entry Point

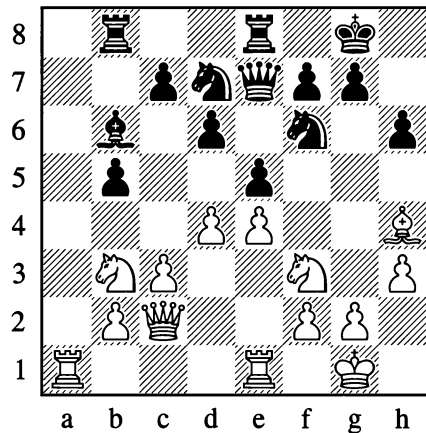
A disparity in the activity of the pieces isn't enough to yield the full point in cases when the two armies cannot engage in direct contact. This statement mostly relates to closed positions, but there is another scenario when it might come into play. It could just be that the defending side firmly controls any entry points to their camp. Without being able to infiltrate, we are unable to commence the full-scale battle that would highlight the greater activity

of our pieces. In such cases, the fight usually revolves around exchanging the piece(s) that protect these entry points.

Magnus Carlsen – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Biel 2018

1.e4 e5 2. ♖f3 ♖c6 3. ♖b5 a6 4. ♖a4 ♖f6
5.d3 b5 6. ♖b3 ♖c5 7.c3 d6 8. ♖g5 h6 9. ♖h4
0–0 10. ♖bd2 ♖e6 11.0–0 ♖b6 12. ♖e1
♖xb3 13. ♖xb3 ♖b8 14.d4 ♖bd7 15.a4 ♖e8
16. ♖c2 ♖e7 17.h3 ♖ab8 18.axb5 axb5



The white pieces are more active than their counterparts. On the other hand, it's not immediately clear if there is any way to take advantage of this disparity in activity, since Black's position appears solid.

19. ♖a5!

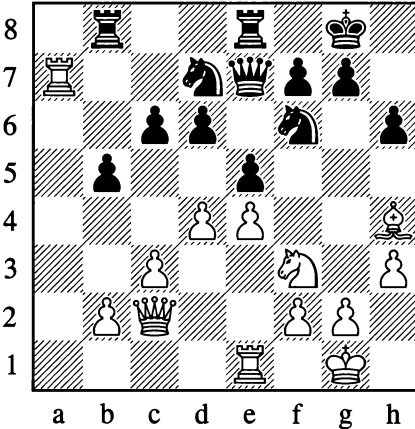
Carlsen finds the weak spot. Due to the threat of ♖c6, he forces Black to trade off his bishop for the knight. As a result, he can penetrate Black's camp on the a7-square which was previously unavailable.

19... ♖xa5

Allowing ♖c6 was even worse: 19... ♖a8? 20. ♖c6 ♖f8 21. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 22.dxe5 dxe5 23. ♖fxe5 White has a clean extra pawn.

20.♖xa5 c6 21.♖a7

Magnus enters the seventh rank and pins the d7-knight. An initiative is starting to develop.

**21...♞e6**

Breaking the pin.

Black couldn't liquidate the major pieces on the open file: 21...♖a8? 22.♙xf6 gxf6 23.♖xa8 ♖xa8 24.♘h4 White gets a decisive attack on the kingside.

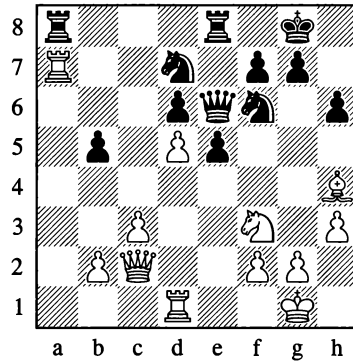
22.♖d1!?

An interesting decision. Carlsen puts his rook on the d-file instead of the open a-file, creating the concrete threat of d4-d5, exploiting Black's hanging knights. If possible, it's usually a good idea to create a threat on every move when handling an initiative.

After the "normal" 22.♖e1 White retains a slight advantage.

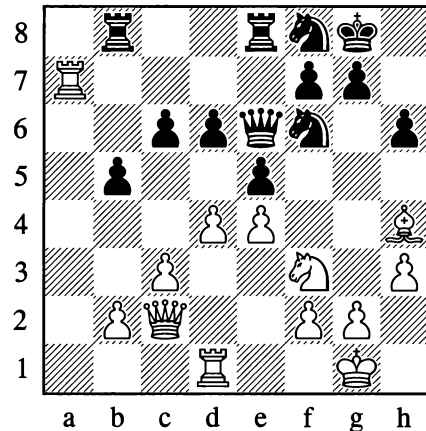
22...♘f8

Again, Black isn't in time to challenge the a-file: 22...♖a8? 23.d5! cxd5 24.exd5



24...♙xd5 (24...♞e7? 25.♙xf6 wins.) 25.♖xd7 ♞xd7 26.♖xd5 White has a pleasant advantage.

22...b4! was an interesting try, activating the b8-rook and inviting the complications after d4-d5 but in a better version.

**23.♖c7?!**

It was extremely natural to threaten the c6-pawn but, objectively, it relinquishes almost all of White's advantage.

The best way forward was:

23. ♖xf6!

This appears counterintuitive as the bishop was putting pressure on the f6-knight. However, in the game the bishop becomes a liability and White doesn't get another chance to take on f6.

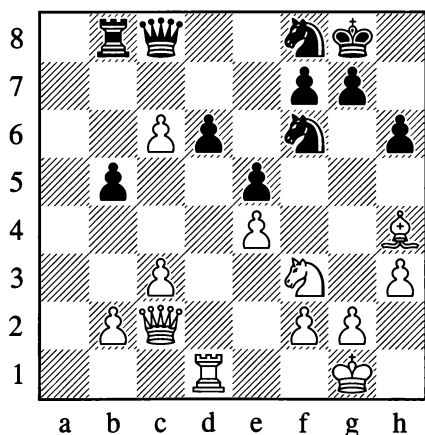
23... ♗xf6 24. d5! cxd5

A worse option for Black is 24...c5 as it can be met by the strong prophylactic move: 25. ♖h2! Preparing to meet ...♖g6 with g2-g3, stopping the black knight from accessing the f4- and h4-squares. After 25...♗d8 26. ♖da1 White has a pleasant, lasting advantage.

25. ♖xd5

White has a slight but durable advantage due to the backward d6-pawn and the d5-outpost.

23... ♖ec8 24. ♖xc6! ♖xc6 25. d5 ♖c8 26. dxc6



26... ♖e8

This move might be forced, but it would have been a good positional move anyway. Black tries to embarrass the white bishop on h4. Note how White didn't get a chance to take on f6 after move 23.

27. ♖e7

Acting quickly before Black gets the time to play ...♖g6.

27... ♗xc6 28. ♖h4

White still has a slight initiative, but it is nothing special. The game eventually ended in a draw.

...½–½

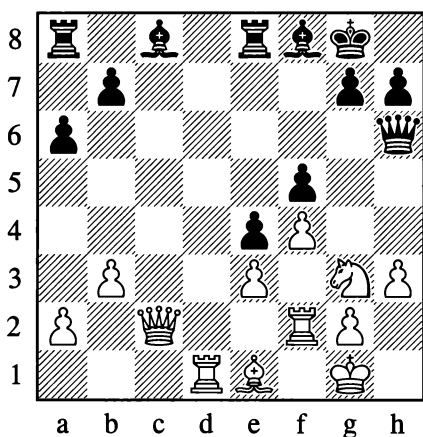
At first sight, Black's position looked rock solid; but after Carlsen managed to eliminate the b6-bishop, he gained access to the a7-square and began to develop a dangerous initiative. The two armies quickly started to engage in direct contact, which will always benefit the side with the more active pieces. Relinquishing Black's control over the entry point was the fundamental part of White's operation. It was also interesting to see that Carlsen is only human, and he missed the chance to increase his advantage with a timely exchange on f6.

It's instructive to note that White managed to force the favourable exchange of the b6-bishop for the b3-knight by poking and prodding the black weaknesses; namely, the c6-square. That will be the topic of discussion in the next segment of this chapter, beginning on page 309. Before moving on to that, let's first check out another example to further emphasize the importance of gaining access to an entry point.

Parham Maghsoodloo – Mateusz Bartel

Munich 2022

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4. e3 a6 5. ♖c3 e6 6. b3 ♖b4 7. ♖d2 ♖bd7 8. ♖d3 0–0 9. 0–0 ♗e7 10. ♗c2 e5 11. dxe5 ♖xe5 12. ♖xe5 ♗xe5 13. cxd5 cxd5 14. ♖e2 ♖d6 15. ♖g3 ♗g5 16. f4 ♗h4 17. ♖f3 ♖e8 18. ♖e1 ♗h6 19. ♖d1 ♖e4 20. h3 f5 21. ♖xe4 dxe4 22. ♖f2 ♖f8

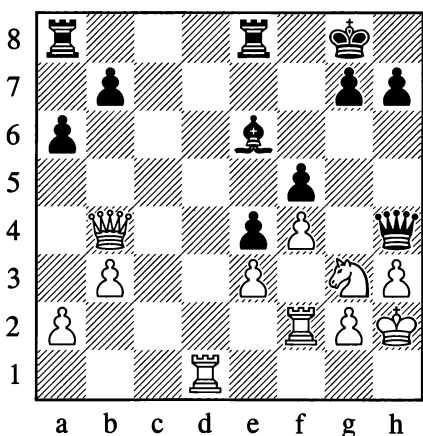


White controls both open files with his queen and rook, but Black has the bishop pair. The f8-bishop is vitally important, as it has the ability to defend the multiple dark-squared weaknesses created by Black's pawn placement. Parham gets rid of it with a simple tactic.

23.♙b4! ♖h4

23...♙b4 does not change anything. After 24.♖c4† ♙e6 25.♖xb4 White has a good advantage, and it is best for Black to transpose with 25...♖h4 26.♙h2, leading us back to the game.

24.♙h2 ♙e6 25.♖c4† ♙e6 26.♖xb4



After the exchange of dark-squared bishops, Black is unable to protect the weak dark

squares inside his camp like c7, d6 and c5. White controls the open files and his knight is much better than his opponent's bishop. Black faces an unenviable defensive task against White's ongoing initiative.

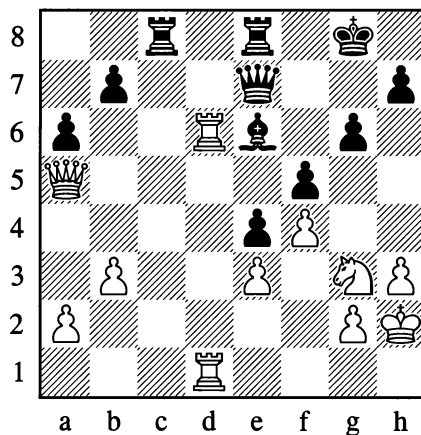
26...♖e7

Bartel can't really do anything with his queen on the kingside, so he decides to bring her back to the centre to defend the queenside.

27.♖a5

White should not exchange the queens. By attacking the f5-pawn, Parham provokes Black into weakening even more dark squares with ...g7-g6 and gets a valuable tempo to double his rooks on the open d-file.

27...g6 28.♖fd2 ♖ac8 29.♖d6



29...♖c7?!

Insisting on exchanging queens, Black misses the opportunity to enter on the second rank.

To reduce the opponent's pressure, it would be better for Black to try to exchange a pair of rooks by activating his own: 29...♖c2 30.♖1d2 ♖ec8 31.♙e2 ♙f7 32.♖b6 ♖xd2 33.♖xd2 ♖c7 34.♖a7 h6 35.♙d4 g5 White still has a large advantage, but Black at least managed to complicate matters a little bit.

This type of mistake is very common. Just because Black would like to exchange queens doesn't mean he should start offering the exchange repeatedly; the opponent is by no means forced to accept. In some cases, this line of action might just help the opponent improve his queen while misplacing our own. The same rationale applies to all types of trades, not just the queen.

Of course, a seasoned grandmaster like Bartel knows that since he was little. The generalization made above mostly applies to amateur chess. In our case, he just didn't believe in the ability of 29...♖c2 to create any counterplay. When defending seriously unpleasant positions it's always tough to find constructive things to do.

30. ♖b4 a5

In the event of 30...♗ed8 31.♗xd8† ♗xd8 32.♗xd8† ♖xd8 33.♖xb7 Black has no compensation for the missing pawn.

31. ♖d4 ♖c3

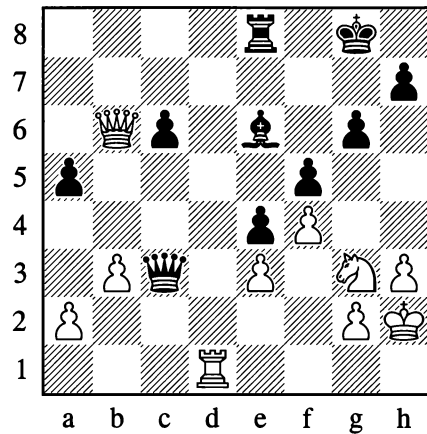
After 31...♕f7, White could have transferred his queen to the kingside by the following powerful manoeuvre: 32.♖d2! ♖c5 33.♖f2! ♗c7 34.♕e2 ♕g8 35.♖h4 White has a huge initiative.

32. ♖b6 ♗c6

This is losing, but it is hard to suggest anything for Black.

33. ♗xc6 bxc6

After 33...♖xc6 34.♖xa5 White wins.



34. ♗d6?!

Not the most precise but good enough.

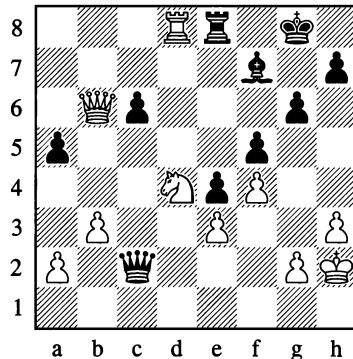
White could put a swift end to Black's misery:

34. ♕e2!

Gaining a tempo and increasing the initiative.

34...♖c2 35. ♗d8 ♕f7 36. ♕d4

Another tempo.



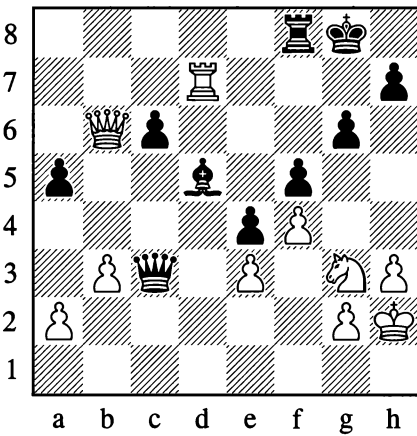
36...♖c3

After 36...♖xa2 37.♗xe8† ♕xe8 38.♖d8 ♕f7 39.♖c7† ♕g8 40.♕e6 ♖b2 41.♖e7 the black king gets checkmated.

37. ♕xc6 ♖xc6 38. ♖xc6 ♗xd8 39. ♖a6

White is trivially winning.

34...♕d5 35. ♗d7 ♗f8

**36. ♖a7**

A step in the wrong direction.

White should overcome his temptation to win material and instead put more pressure on the opponent's kingside:

36. ♖c7! ♜f7 37. ♖d8† ♜f8 38. ♖e7 ♙f7

But not 38... ♜f7?!, due to 39. ♖d8† and 39... ♜g7 runs into an elegant finishing blow: 40. ♙xf5†! gxf5 41. ♖g5#

39. ♖g5

With the threat of ♙xf5.

39... ♖g7 40. ♙e2 c5

Preventing ♙d4.

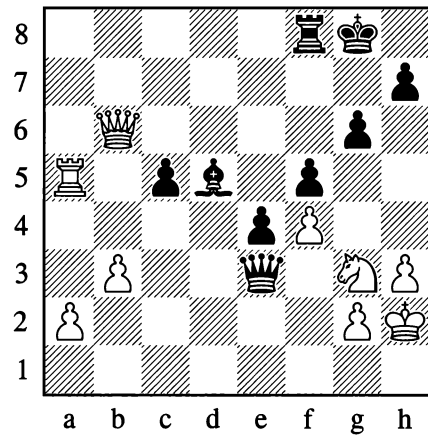
41. h4

Black is completely tied up.

36...c5 37. ♖xa5?

Parham unnecessarily complicates the task and gives his opponent some chances. There was no need to hurry to capture this pawn.

More precise was: 37. ♙f1! ♖b4 38. ♖xa5 ♖xa5 39. ♖xa5 ♜c8 40. ♙g3 ♙f7 41. ♙e2 c4 42. b4! c3 43. b5 c2 44. ♙c1 White wins. Still, that wasn't the easiest of lines. It was better for White to win by attacking the enemy king when Black would never get such chances at counterplay.

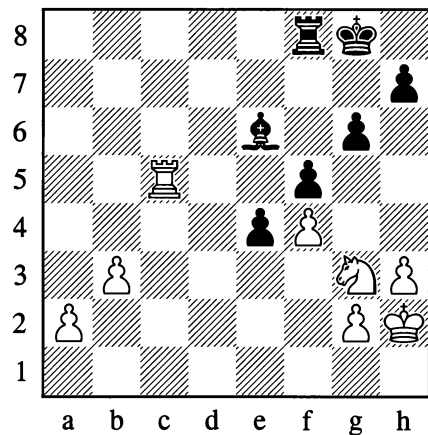
37... ♖xe3**38. ♖xc5**

Black was getting some ideas of ... ♙f7 followed by ... h7-h5-h4, so Parham decides to exchange queens and head for a technical endgame with an extra pawn. He is still better, but most of his advantage is gone, as his dominance was mostly based on the weakness of the black king.

After 38. ♖xc5 ♙f7 39. ♖c7 Black can try 39... h5! with a lot of counterplay.

38... ♖xc5 39. ♖xc5 ♙e6?!

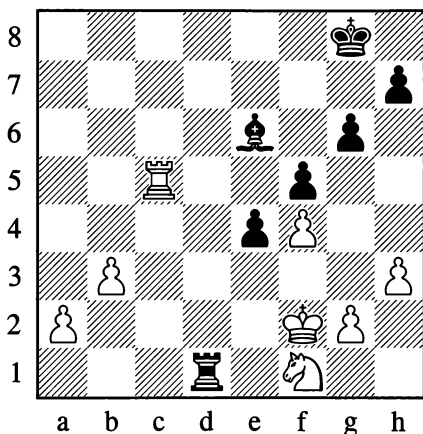
39... ♖d8 was a better defence.

**40. ♙f1?!**

A dubious manoeuvre that allows the black rook to be activated.

White could have retained a good advantage after 40.♖e2! ♜d8 41.♞c2 with the idea of activating the king through g3 and f2.

40...♜d8 41.♖g1 ♜d1 42.♖f2



42...♜a1

Black makes his task slightly trickier.

42...h6! with the idea of ...g6-g5, would give Black even better chances to obtain counterplay: 43.♞c2 (After 43.h4 g5! 44.hxg5 hxg5 45.♞e5 ♖f7 Black has enough counterplay to hold comfortably.) 43...g5 44.g3 ♜a1 45.♞b2 ♖f7 It turns out that even though White is a pawn up, it is impossible to make progress without one of them eventually dropping.

43.♞c2 ♖f7 44.♖g3 h6 45.h4 ♖e7 46.♖e2 ♜d1 47.b4 ♞b1 48.a3

White has only a slight advantage as it is hard to imagine how he's going to push his pawns. Despite that, he eventually got the full point after a long and complicated fight.

...1–0

Black's position didn't look that terrible at first, but it turned out to be atrocious after the trade of dark-squared bishops. White got access to all the dark squares inside the enemy

camp, and the game would have ended much more quickly had White opted for the correct plan of attacking the enemy king. By the way, this game could have also been included in Chapter 3, in the segment titled "Attacking on a Colour Complex".

We can conclude that in order to convert a disparity in the activity of the pieces, you need to initiate some sort of direct conflict. If you can't do that because of a lack of entry points, then the first order of business should be to trade off the piece which is guarding those precious entry squares.

Poking and Prodding

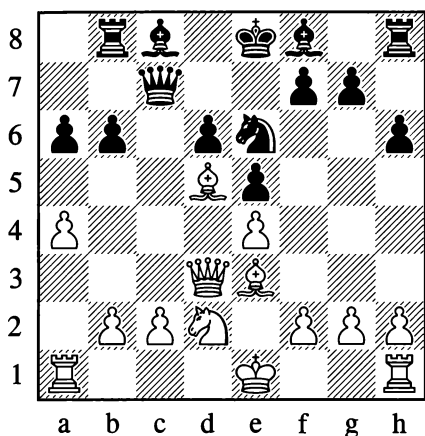
We have already mentioned in passing that creating a threat with each move is generally a good strategy to try and increase our initiative. The most common way of doing so is by poking and prodding the opponent's position where it hurts. That means finding weak squares and threatening to occupy them, finding weak pawns and threatening to capture them, harassing loose pieces, creating mating threats against a weak king, and so on.

In many cases, exchanging a defensive piece can make the weaknesses more pronounced and enhance the strength of operations like the ones mentioned above. Let's check out some relevant examples.

Magnus Carlsen – Farrukh Amonatov

Khanty-Mansiysk 2005

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4 ♖f6 5.♖c3 a6 6.♙e3 e5 7.♖f3 ♞c7 8.a4 b6 9.♖d5 ♖xd5 10.♞xd5 ♖c6 11.♖g5 ♞b8 12.♙c4 ♖d8 13.♞d3 h6 14.♖f3 ♜a8 15.♖d2 ♖e6 16.♙d5 ♞b8



White has a huge advantage thanks to his active pieces and better pawn structure. Black's entire queenside construction looks precarious. Carlsen rightly realizes that it is the black queen who is holding his opponent's position together.

17. ♖c4!

A forcing move that puts Black's weaknesses under immediate pressure.

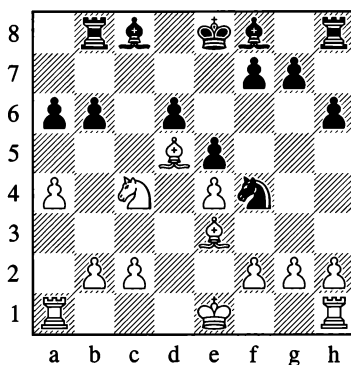
17... ♠c5

The other option was:

17... ♖xc4 18. ♠xc4 ♠f4

In the event of 18... ♠d4 19. 0-0-0 b5 20. axb5 axb5 21. ♠a5 ♠d7 22. ♠xd4 exd4 23. ♠c6 ♠xc6 24. ♠xc6† ♠d8 25. ♠xd4 White gets a winning position because of the extra pawn and his more active pieces. On top of that, Black's position is riddled with weaknesses.

Black's last move initiates a long forcing line:

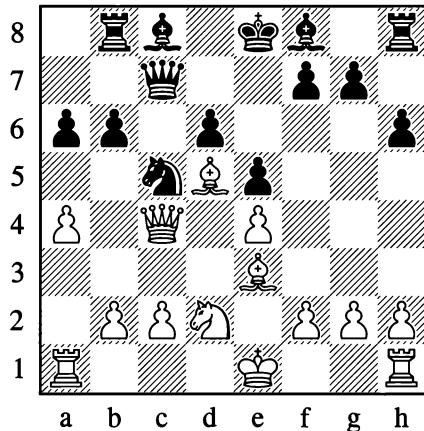


19. ♠c6† ♠d7 20. ♠xd7† ♠xd7 21. ♠xb6† ♠c6 22. a5 ♠xg2† 23. ♠e2 ♠e7 24. b4 ♠xe3 25. fxe3!

Opening the f-file for the white rooks and stopping any ideas of ...f7-f5.

25... ♠d8 26. ♠d5

White obtains a winning positional advantage due to his queenside pawn majority and his mighty knight on d5.



18. b4!

Magnus continues with the strategy of creating threats on every move.

18... b5

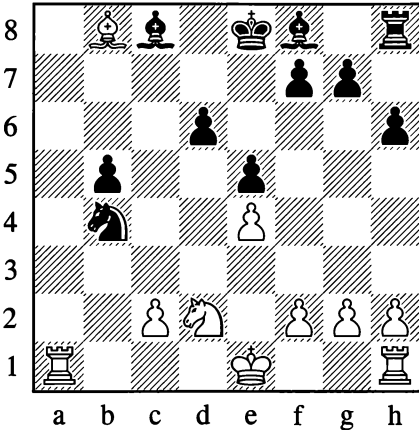
The only move, but Black is still losing an exchange.

18... ♠e6?? would be a blunder, due to 19. ♠xe6 and White wins a piece.

19. **axb5** **axb5** 20. **♖c3** **♜e6** 21. **♜xc7** **♜xc7**
 22. **♙a7**

The b8-rook is trapped.

22... **♜xd5** 23. **♙xb8** **♜xb4**



24.0–0!

Carlsen defends the c2-pawn indirectly, and rapidly completes his development to activate his rooks and break the opponent's resistance in the fastest way possible. It's instructive how he doesn't take his foot off the gas pedal.

24... **♜c6**

After 24... **♜xc2?** 25. **♖a1** White wins a piece.

25. **♖fb1!**

Another powerful attacking move, bringing the last piece into play. It turns out White doesn't even have to move his bishop.

25... **♙e7**

After 25... **♜xb8** 26. **♖a8** **♜c6** 27. **♖xc8†** **♜d7** 28. **♖a8** **b4** 29. **♜c4** Black has no compensation for the exchange.

25... **b4** doesn't help either: 26. **♜c4** **♜d7** 27. **♜b6†** **♜d8** 28. **♙a7** **♙e6** 29. **♜d5** White wins.

26. **♖xb5**

White is completely winning and Black eventually resigned on move 36.

...1–0

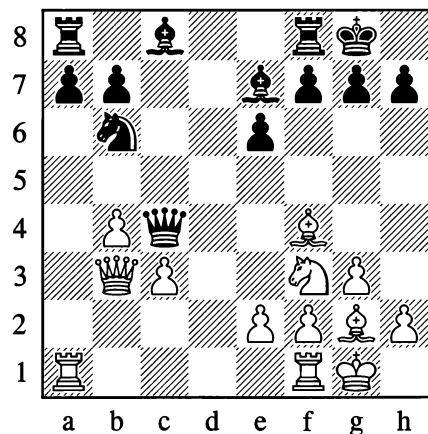
By creating a threat on every move and trading off the primary defender of the black queenside, Carlsen made it look easy. Granted, the initial diagram showed a grim situation for Black, but not everyone is able to convert an advantage so quickly and effortlessly into a full point. "Poking and prodding" worked wonders in this example.

In the next example, Carlsen once again exchanges the main defenders and harasses the opponent's weaknesses until something falls.

Magnus Carlsen – Avital Boruchovsky

Internet (rapid) 2018

1. **g3** **d5** 2. **♙g2** **♜f6** 3. **c4** **e6** 4. **♜f3** **♜bd7**
 5. **♜c2** **c5** 6. **cxd5** **♜xd5** 7. **♜c3** **♜b4** 8. **♜d1**
♙e7 9.0–0 0–0 10. **d4** **♜f6** 11. **a3** **cxd4**
 12. **axb4** **dxcc3** 13. **bxc3** **♜d5** 14. **♜b3** **♜c7**
 15. **♙d2** **♜b6** 16. **♙f4** **♜c4**



17. **♜xc4!**

Carlsen takes advantage of the opportunity to exchange queens. Black's problem is

his undeveloped queenside. Without any defenders around, it will be hard to develop the c8-bishop without the a- and b-pawns dropping.

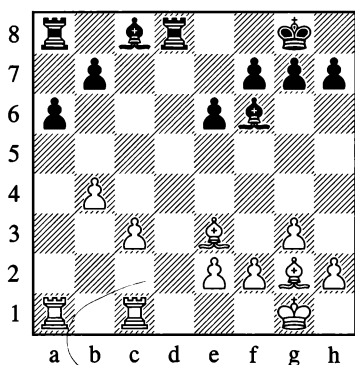
Also interesting was: 17.♖d2 ♜xe2 18.♙e3 ♘d5 19.♜fe1 ♜h5 (But not 19...♜d3?? 20.♙e4! ♜xc3 21.♙xd5 and White wins a piece.) 20.♙xa7 White regains the sacrificed pawn and stands clearly better due to the activity of his pieces. Nevertheless, this line isn't as clear as the game continuation for a human to calculate and assess.

17...♘xc4 18.♘d2!

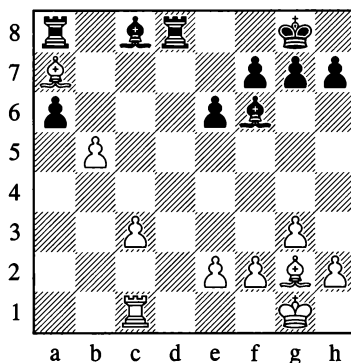
Another forcing move. White opens the long diagonal and tries to exchange the opponent's active knight. If Black refuses, his knight will be forced to abandon its great outpost on c4. If he accepts, then it's one less defender for the black queenside.

18...♙b6

In the event of 18...♘xd2 19.♙xd2 a6 20.♙e3 ♙f6 21.♜fc1 ♜d8 White can crash through with some pretty blows:



22.b5! ♜b8 What else? Without this move Black is paralyzed, and White will start slowly pushing his kingside pawns and centralizing his king. 23.♙a7 ♜a8 24.♙xa6! bxa6

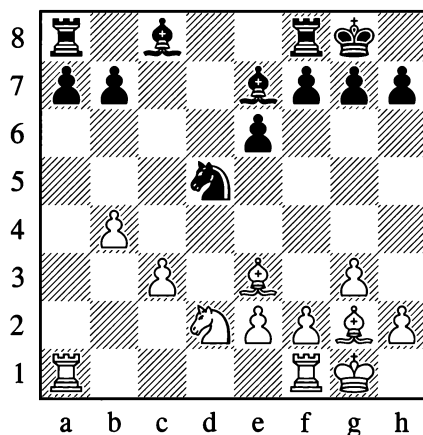


25.b6! The point. White's b-pawn is more important than the a8-rook! 25...♙d7 26.♙xa8 ♜xa8 27.b7 Black can resign.

19.♙e3!

Another threat. The targets are the b6-knight and the a7-pawn.

19...♘d5



20.♙xd5!

Carlsen does not hesitate to part with his pair of bishops if it means getting something clearer. He wins a pawn, gives Black an isolated pawn on d5, and establishes control of the d4-square.

20...exd5 21.♙xa7 ♖d7 22.♙d4 ♙b5
23.♟fe1

Black has no compensation for the pawn deficit.

...1-0

After the queens were removed, the black queenside was almost defenceless against the white threats. Another hugely instructive move was 18.♘d2!, trying to reduce the defenders even more. Every white move was forcing, containing a serious threat. That quickly led to the win of a pawn, which Carlsen had no trouble converting to a full point.

Poking and prodding the opponent's weaknesses is a great strategy when having the initiative. Carlsen has been heard saying multiple times, "According to Garry (Kasparov), if you make ten threats in a row your opponent is going to blunder eventually". Exchanging off the main defender(s) of the opponent's weaknesses goes hand-in-hand with the above insight.

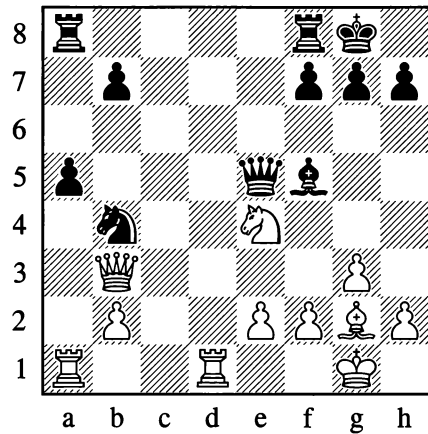
A Single Tempo

We already highlighted this in Chapter 3, while dissecting the relationship between exchanges and king safety. Sometimes, winning a single tempo is all it takes to turn a situation upside down. Threatening an exchange our opponent needs to decline is one of the methods of winning that crucial tempo.

Magnus Carlsen – Luis Galego

Reykjavik 2006

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♙b4† 4.♙d2 c5
5.♙xb4 cxb4 6.g3 0-0 7.♙g2 ♟e7 8.0-0 d6
9.♟b3 a5 10.a3 ♘a6 11.axb4 ♘xb4 12.♘c3
e5 13.c5 e4 14.cxd6 ♟xd6 15.♘g5 ♟xd4
16.♟fd1 ♟e5 17.♘gxe4 ♘xe4 18.♘xe4 ♙f5



At first glance, everything looks good for Black. His queen and bishop are very active, and his knight is well-placed on the b4-outpost. The queenside pawn majority "guarantees" good play in an endgame.

On the other hand, White is fully developed, and his knight would be ready to jump to d6 if it wasn't for ...♙c2, winning the exchange.

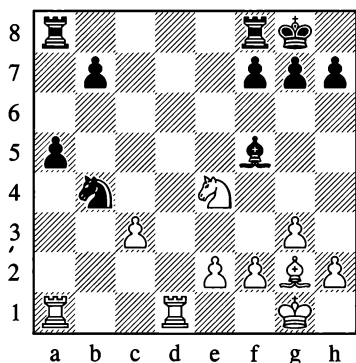
19.♟c3!

A game changer, throwing a spanner in the works of the black operation. Carlsen tries to enter a favourable endgame by exchanging queens. If Black refuses the exchange, he will have to retreat his queen to a worse position and, as a result, his activity will be severely reduced. At the same time, the queen steps away from ...♙c2, so White is ready for ♘d6.

19...♟e7

Accepting the trade of queens causes the black knight to be driven away from its good position and wins White another tempo. Furthermore, similarly to the games shown in the previous segment, without a queen holding on to the weaknesses the black queenside comes under even more severe pressure. Despite all that, it was still a lesser evil compared to the game:

19...♙xc3 20.bxc3



20...♙xe4

The most logical, not allowing ♖d6.

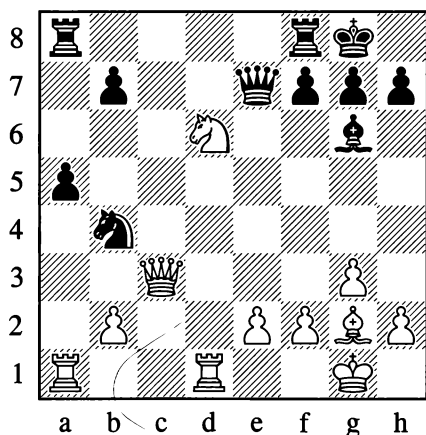
After 20...♖c6 21.♖d6 ♙c6 22.♙db1 ♙a7

23.♙d5 Black is completely tied up.

21.♙xe4 ♖c6 22.♙d7 ♙fe8 23.f3 ♖d8 24.♙d5 a4 25.♙b5

White has a clear advantage due to his active pieces and Black's weak pawns on the queenside. Pay attention to the huge difference in power between the black knight and the white bishop in this open position where play takes place on both sides.

20.♖d6 ♙g6



The tempo White won with the inclusion of the moves 19.♙xc3! and 19...♙e7 has altered the situation completely. The black queen is no longer active, the b4-knight is stable but doesn't threaten anything, the g6-bishop stares at useless empty squares, and the black rooks can't be activated because of the monster knight on d6 controlling c8 and clogging the d-file. The b7-pawn is hard to protect but, sadly, that's the least of Black's problems.

21.♙d2!

There is no rush to grab the b7-pawn. Black is doomed to passivity so White should slowly improve without hurrying too much.

21.♖xb7?! would give Black some chances: 21...♙ac8 22.♙f3 ♙c2 With annoying counterplay.

21...♙fb8

Black is forced to defend his pawn with this ugly move if he wants to keep material balance.

22.h4!

With the black pieces tied to the defence of the queenside, Carlsen starts to launch an attack on the kingside, aiming to stretch the black defence to its breaking point. That's once again (we've seen it before!) the principle of two weaknesses in action.

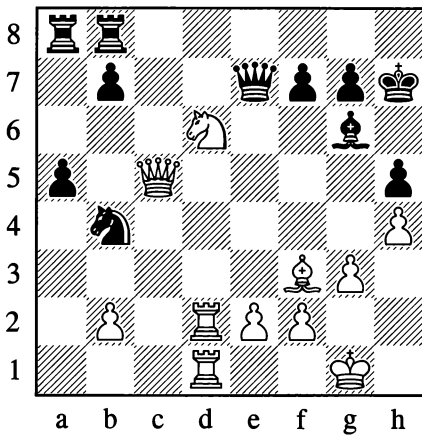
22...h6 23.♙f3

Provoking ...h6-h5.

23...h5

The h5-pawn is a new weakness.

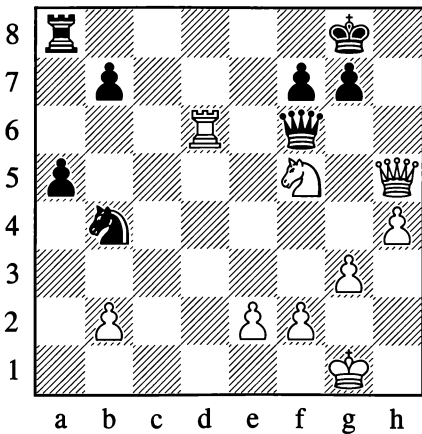
24.♙ad1 ♖h7 25.♙c5



The newly created target on h5 is about to fall. Black's defences are stretched to their breaking point and things will soon get even worse.

25...♖c8 26.♜b5 ♜c2 27.♙xh5 ♜xd2
28.♜xd2 ♙xh5 29.♜xh5† ♔g8 30.♙f5 ♜f6
31.♜d6

The harmony among White's three pieces is spectacular, and the end is nigh.



31...♜xb2 32.♜d7 ♜b1†

32...♜f6 33.♙e7† ♔f8 34.♜h8# is another cute finish.

33.♙h2

Black should give away his queen to avoid checkmate, so he decided to throw in the towel.

1–0

A move that wins a tempo isn't always necessarily threatening to win material. Threatening to achieve positional gains can also be effective. Proposing a favourable exchange (19.♜c3!) is a common way of winning a crucial tempo, so be sure to remember this type of trick.

Tactics

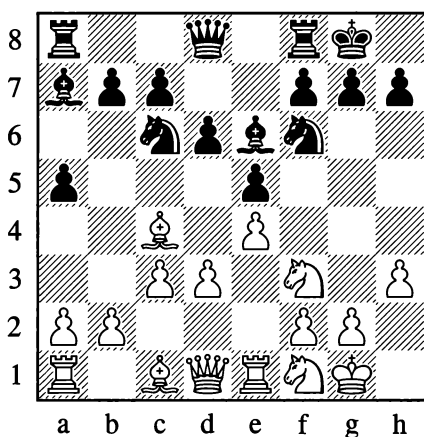
In this chapter (and throughout the book), we've already seen countless forcing operations. Isn't this a book about strategy and "Understanding Chess Exchanges"? Of course it is. However, we can't run away from the nature of our game. Chess is a concrete game; hence, strategy without tactics is just a pointless set of void principles.

The term "Tactics" doesn't only refer to operations that win material or deliver checkmate. It's a relevant term when referring to any concrete operation. Thus, tactics can be the means to achieve a favourable exchange.

Peio Duboue – Lucas van Foreest

Chartres 2022

1.e4 e5 2.♙f3 ♙c6 3.♙c4 ♙f6 4.d3 ♙c5
5.0–0 0–0 6.h3 d6 7.c3 a5 8.♜e1 ♙e6
9.♙bd2 ♙a7 10.♙f1?



10...dxc4!

A common tactical motif in such positions.

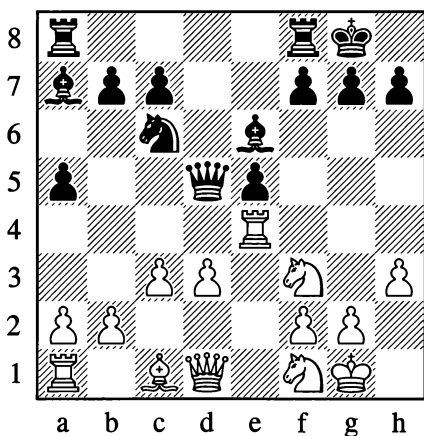
11. Bxc4

11. Qxe6?? runs into 11... Qxf2 and Black wins.

11...d5 12. Qxd5

12. Qg5 also doesn't help: 12... f6 13. Qe3 dxc4 14. Qxa7 Bxa7 15. dxc4 Qxd1 16. Bxd1 Baa8 Black has a large advantage due to his better structure.

12... Qxd5



The results of Black's combination are clear. He gained the advantage of the two bishops

and saddled his opponent with a weak pawn on d3. White can get rid of his opponent's bishop pair, but Black can still count on the weak d3-pawn.

12... Qxd5!? would also be interesting: 13. Re1 Qc5 14. Qe3 Qd6 With the idea of ...f7-f5 or ... Bf6.

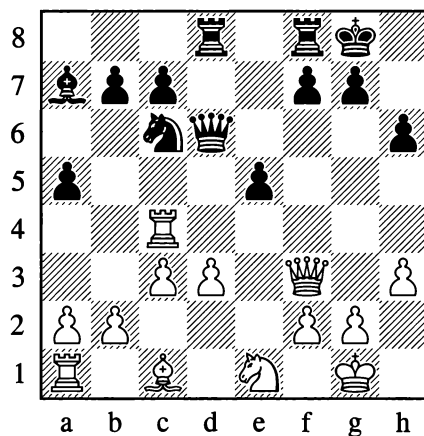
13. Qe3 Qd6 14. Qc4 Qxc4 15. Bxc4 Bxd8 16. Qe1 h6?!

Playing energetically with 16...b5! was better. After 17. Re4 a4 Black has a pleasant advantage.

17. Bf3?

White neglects the vulnerable position of his rook on c4.

After 17. Bb3 Bf6 18. Qe3 Qxe3 19. fxe3 b6 20. Bd1 Black has only a slight advantage.



17...f5!

Introducing the threat of ...e5-e4.

18. Bg3

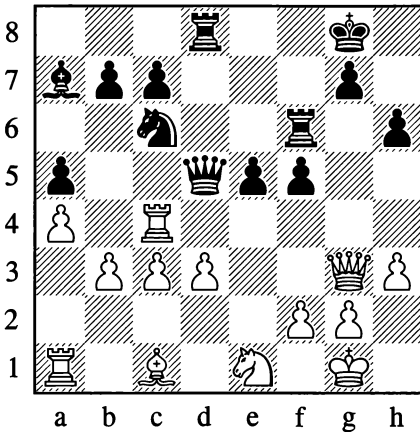
If 18. Qe3, then 18...e4 19. dxe4 Qe5 and Black wins.

18... Bf6

18...b5! 19. Bh4 Bf6 was even stronger.

19.a4

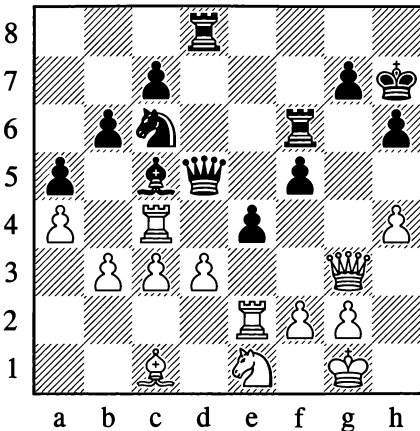
Preventing Black from playing ...b5.

19...♖d5 20.b3**20...♗c5?!**

20...♖f7! 21.♖a2 ♜e8! followed by ...e5-e4 would have finished the game quickly: 22.♞e2 e4! 23.d4 f4 24.♖g4 f3 25.♞e3 ♜f4 26.♖g3 ♞e6 White can't do anything against Black's relentless attack.

21.♖a2!

The rook comes to the defence using the second rank.

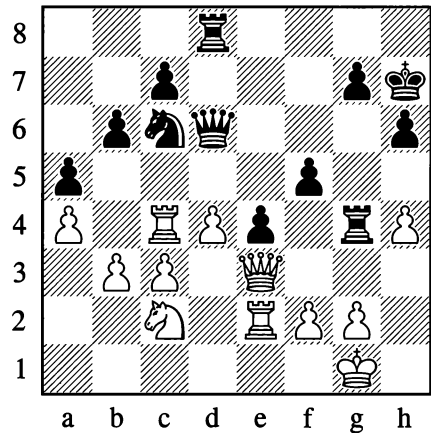
21...b6 22.♞e2 ♜h7 23.h4 e4**24.d4?**

After creating some chances to hold, White collapses. The text move just helps the c5-bishop to a better diagonal and takes away the central tension that distracted Black from his attack on the kingside.

24.♗f4 should have been played.

24...♗d6 25.♗f4 ♜g6 26.♖e3 ♜g4 27.♗xd6 ♖xd6 28.♜c2?

Making Black's task even easier, but White was lost anyway.

**28...♜e7!**

After transferring the knight to d5 the game is practically over. The rook on c4 is totally out of action.

29.♖c1 ♜d5 30.♜e3 ♜xh4 31.g3 ♜xe3 32.♖xe3 ♜g4 33.d5 ♖xd5 34.♗d4 ♖g8 35.♗xd8 ♖xd8

Black is completely winning and converted his advantage without any trouble.

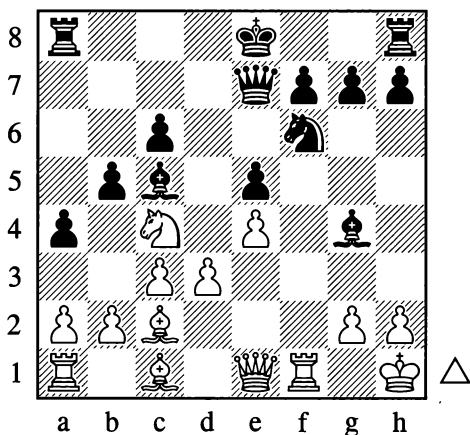
...0-1

The strike 10...♜xe4! was obviously a success, as it enabled Black to exchange the f6-knight for the c4-bishop, and the d6-pawn for its counterpart on e4.

In the next game, Firouzja employs a similar tactic to force a favourable exchange and score an important win in the Candidates tournament.

Alireza Firouzja – Richard Rapport

Madrid 2022



17. ♖xe5!

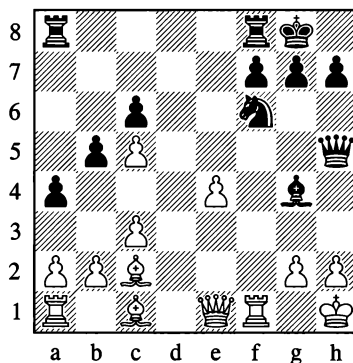
A standard blow. Alireza eliminates the opponent's only remaining pawn in the centre and gains the advantage of the bishop pair. With the black king still in the centre, this is also the only move not to take the foot off the gas pedal.

17... ♗xe5 18. d4 ♕xd4

Another logical try was:

18... ♗h5 19. dxc5 0–0

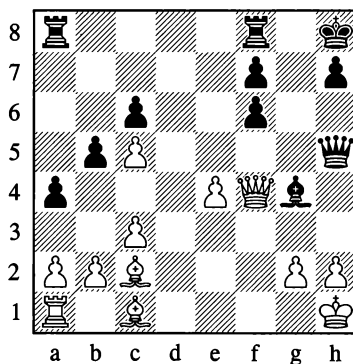
After 19... ♖d7 20. ♕f4 0–0 21. ♕d6 White has a great advantage due to his extra pawn and bishop pair.



20. ♗xf6!

A strong exchange sacrifice, shattering the shelter of the black king.

20... gxf6 21. ♗g3 ♖h8 22. ♗f4



22... ♖g8

After 22... ♖g7 23. ♕e3 ♗ad8 24. ♗f1 ♖g8 25. ♕d4 White gets a winning attack.

23. ♕e3

The dark squares around the black king are weak and White has all the easy moves. Black is in a world of pain.

19. cxd4 ♗xd4 20. ♕e3?

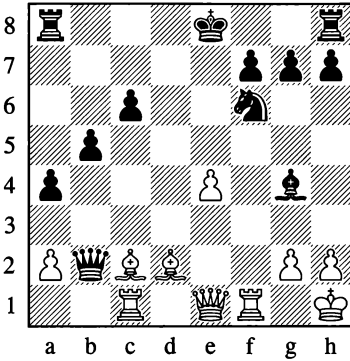
It was tempting to gain this tempo, but it turns out to be a serious mistake.

Alireza could have benefited from the power of his two bishops in a better way:

20.♙d2!

Planning to put the bishop on the long diagonal with ♗c3.

20...♜xb2 21.♞c1



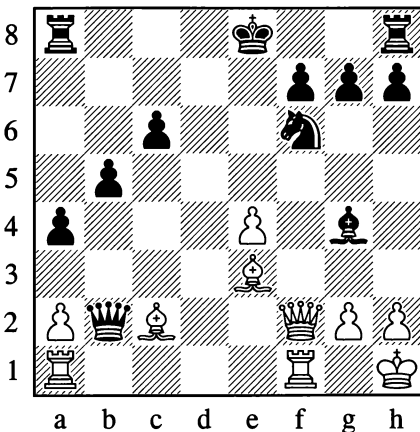
21...♞e5

21...♞d7 is even worse: 22.♙c3 ♜xa2 23.h3 ♙h5 24.♞g3 ♙g6 25.♙xg7 ♞g8 26.♙c3 Black has two extra pawns, but he cannot survive against White's initiative. If the king tries to go long with 26...0-0-0? White has 27.♙a5 and the game is immediately over.

22.♙c3 ♞e7 23.♙d3

With the lethal threat of ♙b4. White's initiative is still going strong.

20...♜xb2 21.♞f2



21...♙e6!

Rapport overprotects the vulnerable pawn on f7 while at the same time creating the option for ...♞g4.

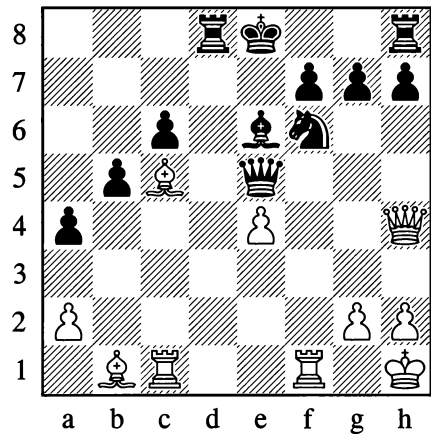
21...♞d8 22.e5! ♞xe5 23.♙c5 is dangerous for the black king who is stuck in the centre.

22.♙d4 ♞b4 23.♙c5 ♞c3 24.♞ac1

White rejects the offer of a repetition. Firouzja is fighting for victory.

24.♙d4 ♞b4 25.♙c5 ♞c3 was a way to end the game on the spot.

24...♞d8 25.♙b1 ♞e5 26.♞h4



26...♙c4?

Rapport, who had defended very well so far, makes a mistake. Vacating the vital e6-square gets him in trouble.

26...h6 with the idea of ...♞g5 is the best defence when Black could even begin harbouring some ambitions of his own.

27.♞f5 ♞b2 28.♞g1?

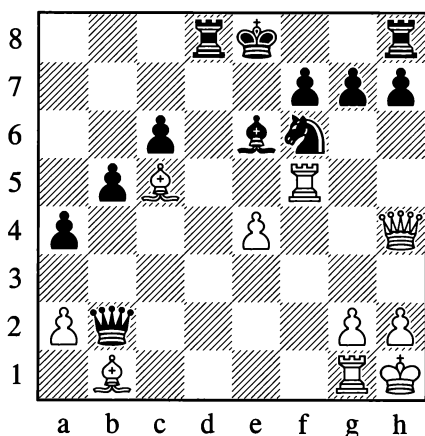
Allowing Black some defensive possibilities.

Stronger was: 28.♞e1! ♙e6 (28...♞d2 does not work due to 29.e5! ♞d5 30.e6! and White wins.) 29.♞g3! White is winning.

28...♙e6?

Black does not take advantage of the golden opportunity.

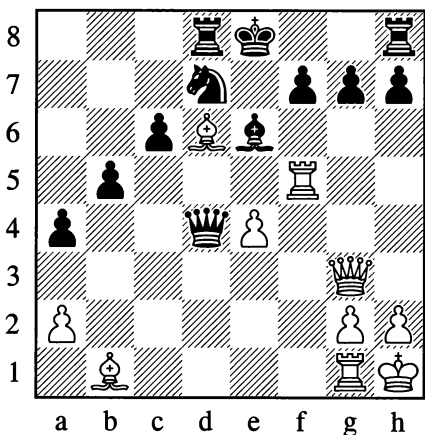
He should have played 28...♖d2 with a complicated battle.

**29.♖g3!**

With the black king stuck in the centre and the rook on h8 completely out of action, Alireza starts with the fireworks.

29...♘d7

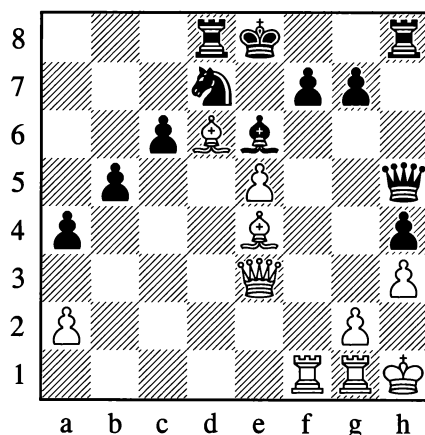
The rook is untouchable: 29...♙xf5? 30.exf5 With the deadly threat of ♖e1†.

30.♙d6 ♖d4**31.♖ff1!**

The mission of the rook on f5 is completed. White wants to continue with e4-e5, cutting the black queen off from the defence of the g7-pawn. Black is busted, as his king is permanently stuck in the centre.

31...h5 32.e5 ♖g4 33.♖e3 h4

In the event of 33...♘f6 White wins with: 34.♖c5 ♖xd6 35.♖xd6 ♘d7 36.♖d1 The black king remains stuck in the mud.

34.h3 ♖h5 35.♙e4

White is winning and Alireza cleanly leads the game towards victory.

35...♖h6 36.♖f3 f6

With his king stuck in the centre, Black has no choice but to make this weakening move, trying to escape with the king to f7. However, it does not help, and the game will end shortly.

37.♙xc6 ♔f7

37...fxe5?? 38.♖f8†! ♖xf8 39.♖xf8# would also be a nice finish.

38.♙xb5 ♖h5 39.♖e4 ♘xe5 40.♙e2 ♖g5 41.♙xe5

Rapport decided to call it a day.
1-0

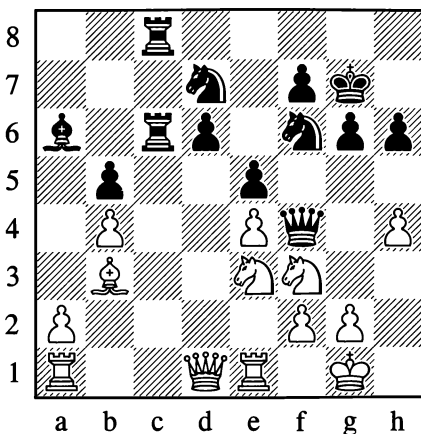
Once again, White used tactics to get a favourable trade of pieces. The centre was blown to smithereens, and he obtained an unopposed dark-squared bishop which he used to ensure that the black king would have to stay in the centre. The extraordinarily complicated nature of the position forced both players to commit some mistakes later on, but, as so often happens, the side with the initiative eventually prevailed.

Of course, it's not only tactics that can serve us to achieve a proper exchange, but also exchanges that can serve an important part of a tactical operation, much like in the game below:

Magnus Carlsen – Bartosz Socko

Germany 2006

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3
♘b8 10.d4 ♘bd7 11.♘bd2 ♙b7 12.♙c2
♞e8 13.♘f1 ♙f8 14.♘g3 g6 15.b3 ♙g7
16.d5 ♞e7 17.c4 ♞f8 18.♙e3 ♙h6 19.♙xh6
♞xh6 20.cxb5 axb5 21.b4 ♞ec8 22.♙b3 c5
23.dxc6 ♞xc6 24.♞d3 ♙a6 25.♘f1 ♞ac8
26.♘e3 ♞f4 27.♞d1 h6 28.h4 ♙g7



Black has many weaknesses. He has a backward pawn on d6, the d5-square is weak, and his queen is awkwardly placed on the f4-square. If the e4-pawn was supported, the queen would be trapped after g2-g3.

29.♙d5!

A strong move that wins an exchange by force. We have already given many examples where exchanging pieces helped a certain strategy. In this case, Carlsen uses exchanges to serve a tactical purpose. By defending the e4-pawn he creates the threat of g2-g3 and forces his opponent to exchange on d5.

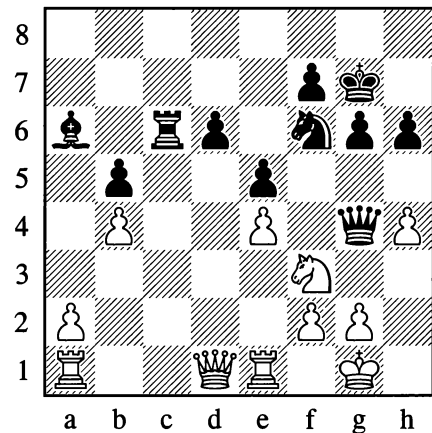
29...♘xd5

After 29...♘xd5 30.♙xc6 ♞xc6 31.♘d5 ♞g4 White has the unnecessary but nice 32.♘xe5!, winning on the spot: 32...♞xd1 33.♞axd1 ♘xe5 34.♞xe4 Game over.

30.♘xd5

A fork on the queen and the e7-square.

30...♞g4 31.♘e7 ♘f6 32.♘xc6 ♞xc6



33.a4

White is an exchange up and Carlsen eventually won.

...1-0

This segment serves as an important reminder: We shouldn't think of exchanges only as a positional tool. Everything in our game relates to tactics. Tactics can serve as the means of achieving the positional goal of a desirable exchange and, in exchange (pun intended), exchanges can play a crucial part in larger tactical operations.

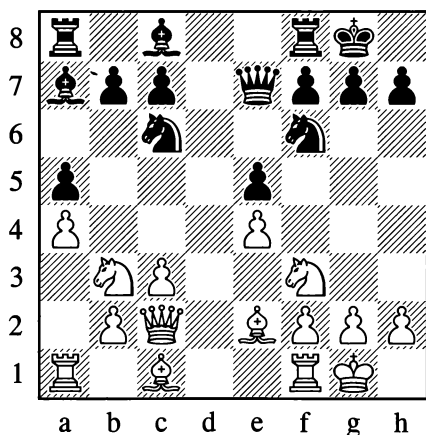
Repelling the Initiative

We've seen numerous ways in which exchanges can help us seize or increase the initiative, but they can also play a crucial role in defusing one. Trading off as many pieces as possible is a common strategy in cases when we find ourselves under any sort of dynamic pressure. That's exactly what Teimour Radjabov did to score an important win in the Candidates tournament of 2022.

Teimour Radjabov – Hikaru Nakamura

Madrid 2022

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♙c5
5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d5 7.♘bd2 dxe4 8.dxe4 a5
9.♖c2 ♗e7 10.a4 ♘a7 11.♙e2 ♘c6 12.♘b3
♙a7



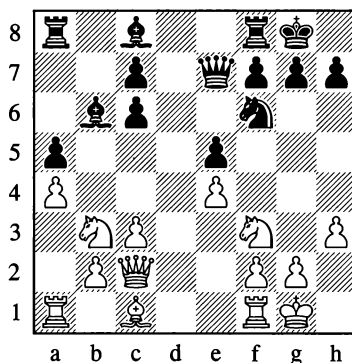
13.♙b5!

White intends to exchange his bishop for the knight on c6 to create some weaknesses on the black queenside.

13...♙g4?

A natural but wrong reaction. Instead of protecting his a5-pawn, Nakamura decides to go for a speculative pawn sacrifice.

13...♙b6 was a better option, with the following point: 14.♙xc6?! (White should prefer 14.♘bd2, but after 14...♘a7 Black remains solid.) 14...bxc6 Unlike the game continuation, the exchange on c6 does not work well for White here. For example: 15.h3



15...c5! 16.♘bd2 ♙a6 17.c4 ♘d7! Black is at least fine, intending to transfer his knight to the d4-square via b8 and c6. In fact, with the mighty knight on d4, he could start getting some ambitions of his own.

14.♙xc6!

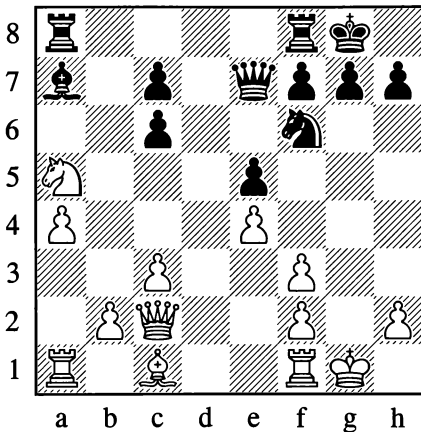
White is still in his preparation. Radjabov had analysed the position well, and knew he should not be afraid of ruining his kingside structure.

14...♙xf3

After 14...bxc6 15.♘xa5 Black should take on f3 and transpose to the game, as 15...♙xf2† only helps White: 16.♙xf2 ♙xa5 17.♙g5

White has both the initiative and a terribly strong queenside majority. Black is already on the verge of defeat.

15.gxf3 bxc6 16.♖xa5



White has an extra pawn but a damaged kingside structure. It's most instructive to observe the way Radjabov slowly but surely repels Black's initiative on the kingside.

16...♙e6

After 16...♙xf2† 17.♙xf2 ♖xa5 18.b4 ♖aa8 19.♙e3, White's passed a-pawn is very powerful.

17.♙c2!

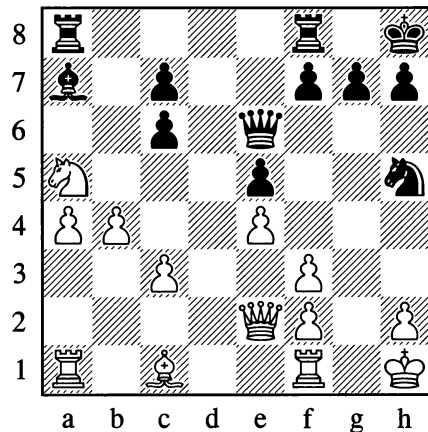
Bringing the queen closer to the kingside, pre-emptively protecting the f3-pawn and introducing the option of a timely ♙c4.

17...♘h5 18.b4 ♕h8

With his last few moves Black is consistently preparing ...f7-f5, looking for some counterplay on the kingside. He couldn't do without tucking the king away on h8 because of White's option to exchange queens on c4.

19.♕h1!

White is also getting ready to meet ...f7-f5.



19...h6

Black was still not ready to push:

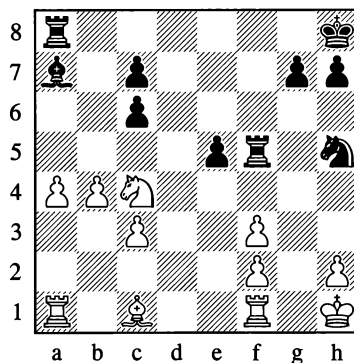
19...f5 20.exf5 ♖xf5 21.♙c4!

A recurring theme. Exchanging queens will leave Black in a miserable state and White is constantly trying to take advantage of that.

21...♙xc4

21...♙g6 22.♙xc6! was one of the main points behind 19.♕h1!. The black queen did not come to g6 with check, so White can use this trick to force the exchange of queens.

22.♘xc4

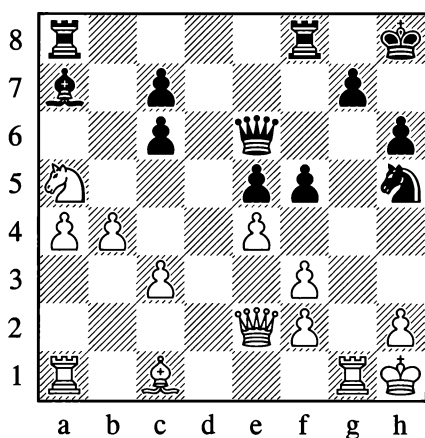


A long, forced sequence follows:

22...♖xf3 23.♙e3 ♙xe3 24.fxe3! ♖xa4 25.♖xa4 ♖xf1† 26.♕g2 ♖f8 27.♖a7 ♖c8 28.♘xe5

White wins.

20.♖g1 f5



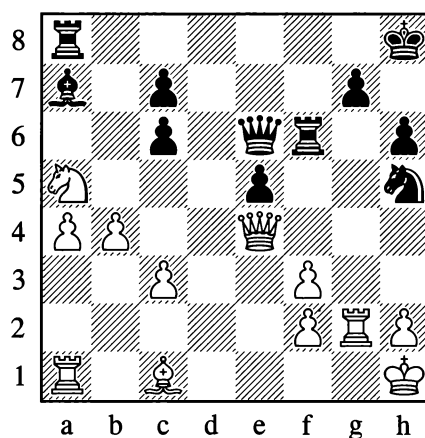
21...fxe4

Radjabov continues to calmly stabilize the situation on the kingside. He knows that if he keeps everything under control, his a-pawn is going to be enough to decide the game on its own.

However, following the same reaction as in the note to Black's 19th move was even stronger: 21.exf5! fxf5 (21...xfxf5 can be met with 22.fxc6 and White wins.) 22.c4! xc4 23.fxc4 Once again, White has a huge advantage after a trade of queens because of his better structure.

21...fxe4 22.c4! xc4

In the event of 22...h3 White would get a winning position by sacrificing the f3-pawn: 23.g4! xf3 24.fxf3 fxf3 25.fxc6 fxc3 26.fxa7 fxa7 27.a5 With a decisive advantage.



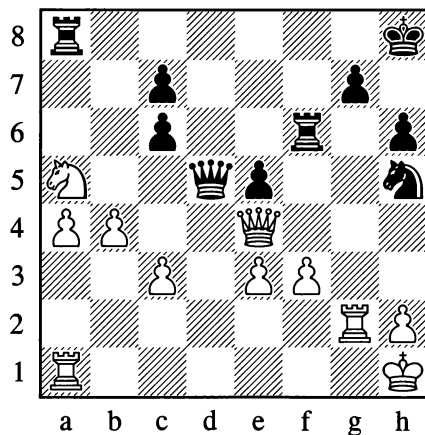
23...e3!

White is still a pawn up, and his passed a-pawn has great potential. Every time a piece is exchanged the opponent's chances of holding are severely decreased.

23...e3! xc3

After 23...f4 24.fxf4 fxf4 25.fxc6 fxc6 26.fxc6 fxf3 27.fxa7 fxa7 28.fa3 White is technically winning.

24.fxe3 e3d5



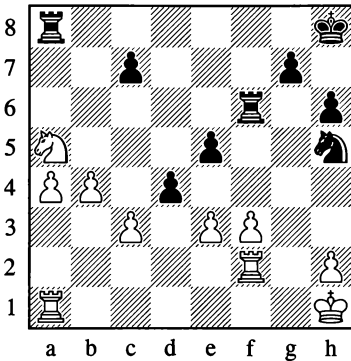
25.fg4!?

White momentarily refuses to exchange queens, only because he doesn't want to do that while fixing the black structure.

The queens will be exchanged anyway after Black takes on f3 on the next move (it's forced), but on a different square.

The alternative was also interesting:

25. ♖xd5 cxd5 26. ♖f2 d4!



27. ♘c4!

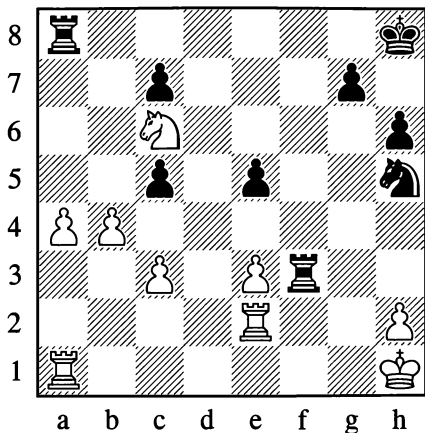
White guarantees the longevity of his queenside structure.

27. cxd4 exd4 28. exd4 ♖b6 was Black's idea, when he gains serious counterplay.

27... dxc3 28. ♖c2 ♖xf3 29. ♖xc3

White has a big advantage due to the powerful a-pawn. However, the game continuation is not bad either.

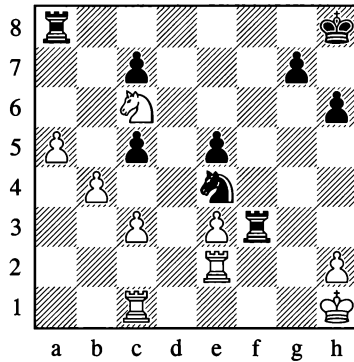
25... ♖xf3 26. ♖xf3 ♖xf3 27. ♖e2 c5 28. ♘c6



28... cxb4?

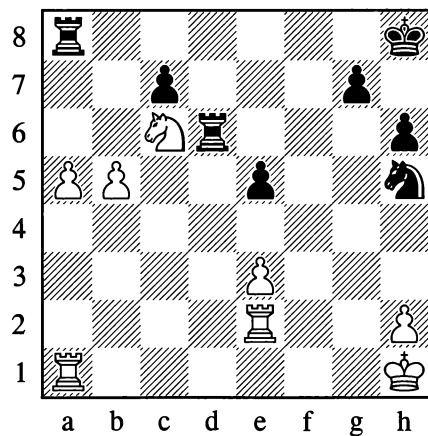
There was no reason to rid White of the weak c3-pawn.

Instead, Black should have played: 28... ♘f6! 29. a5! White should not be tempted to take the e5-pawn. (After 29. ♘xe5 ♖f5 30. ♘d3 ♘e4 31. ♖c2 ♖f3 Black's pieces are activated and he gets good chances to hold.) 29... ♘e4 30. ♖c1



30... ♖f6! 31. ♘xe5 ♖e8 32. ♘d3 ♖d6 33. ♘e1 White has an extra pawn, but Black retains decent drawing chances.

29. cxb4 ♖f6 30. b5 ♖d6 31. a5



The a-pawn decides.

31... ♘f6 32. a6 ♘d7 33. a7 ♔g8 34. ♖c2 ♔f7 35. ♘b4 c5 36. bxc6 ♘b6 37. e4 ♘c8

38.♖ca2 ♔e6 39.♖a6 ♜d4 40.♟d5 ♔d6
41.♟b6

Black resigned as he can't prevent heavy material losses.

1-0

A game of the highest quality by the Azeri super-grandmaster, giving his formidable opponent almost no chances after out-preparing him in the opening. He methodically repulsed every bit of Black's initiative by exchanging off his more threatening pieces. All his moves revolved around this strategy (17.♞e2!, 19.♟h1!, 23.♞e3!). He even had a cleaner option with 21.exf5! which was virtually his only mistake in the entire game. With the black queen and bishop finally exchanged, the endgame was always going to be pleasant for White, and the advantage quickly became decisive after 28...cxb4?.

We won't always have the initiative, so it's a good idea to be prepared to play against it. Classical wisdom always saw exchanges as an indispensable tool in efforts to repel the initiative, and that often holds true. However, you saw several examples in this chapter of how, when used properly, exchanges can also help us seize the initiative or amplify the strength of our dynamic superiority. Conversely, when facing an initiative you should look for ways to exchange the right pieces, but don't blindly assume that exchanges will always bring the defending side closer to a draw.

The Principle of Two Weaknesses

In many cases, even though our opponent is passively defending a weakness we have previously created in his camp, we are unable to increase our advantage by continuously piling up on that same weakness. If material is equal, that's only logical. After all, we can only attack a weakness the same number of times as the opponent can defend it.

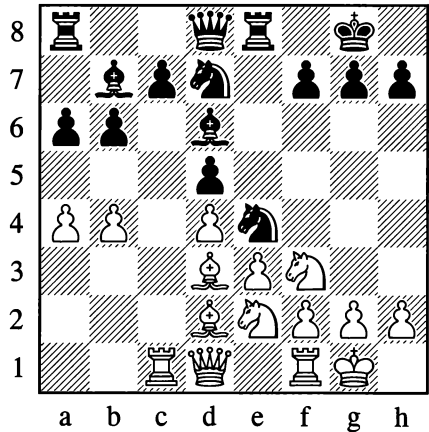
In such cases, it's common to look for a second weakness to "stretch" the opponent's defensive formation as much as possible. This second weakness can very often be the opponent's king. This process often changes the nature of the game and takes us from a positional phase to a tactical one.

The following masterpiece by Armenia's Shant Sargsyan is truly breathtaking and encompasses many of the principles we demonstrated throughout this book.

Shant Sargsyan – Gupta Sankalp

Sharjah 2022

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 d5 4.♟c3 ♞b4 5.e3
0-0 6.♞d2 b6 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♞c1 a6 9.♞d3
♞d6 10.0-0 ♞e8 11.♟e2 ♟bd7 12.b4 ♞b7
13.a4 ♟e4

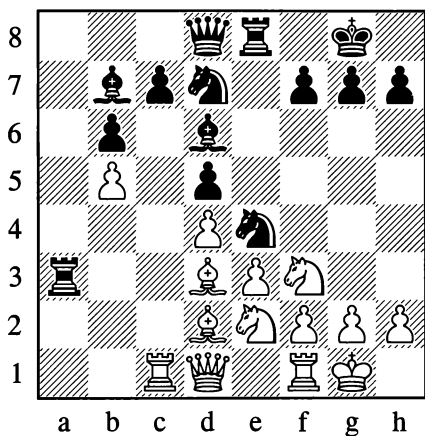


White has an easier game due to his slight pressure on the queenside, but Black has a solid position and is also quite active himself.

14.b5!

As the first step of his plan, White fixes the backward pawn on c7 and restricts the b7-bishop.

14...axb5 15.axb5 ♖a3



16.♗c3!

Sargsyan offers the exchange of his passive bishop for the opponent's powerful knight. Accepting the exchange will leave Black with a passive piece on b7 while White will get rid of the bishop which is currently restricted by the white pawn structure.

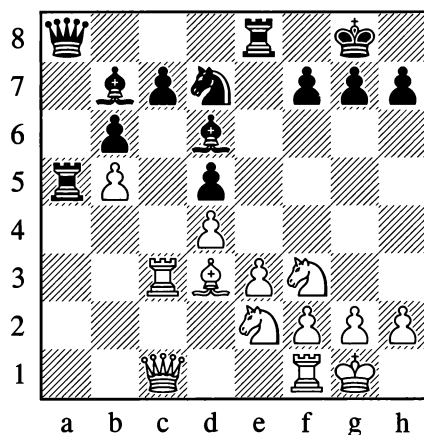
16...♘xc3

Counterintuitive but an objectively fine choice. If Black did not accept the exchange, White could increase his pressure on the queenside with ♗b2 and ♖c2, planning an eventual ♖a1 and ♗a3. That was the main idea behind 16.♗c3!. White was slowly trying to trade off the d6-bishop and weaken Black's control over the c7-pawn.

17.♖xc3 ♗a8 18.♖c1

18.♖c2 ♘f6 19.♖xa3 ♗xa3 20.♘e5 is also good enough for a slight advantage.

18...♖a5



19.♘f4

A logical move but not the most precise.

Extremely strong was:

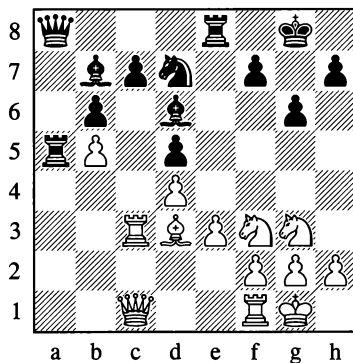
19.♘g3!

The idea is ♘f5.

19...g6

Practically forced, but weakening the dark squares around the black king.

After 19...♘f6 20.♘f5 ♗c8 21.♘xd6 cxd6 22.♖b1 White gets rid of his opponent's bishop pair, manages to ruin his structure, and controls the c-file. His position is objectively better and much easier to play.



20.♖xc7!

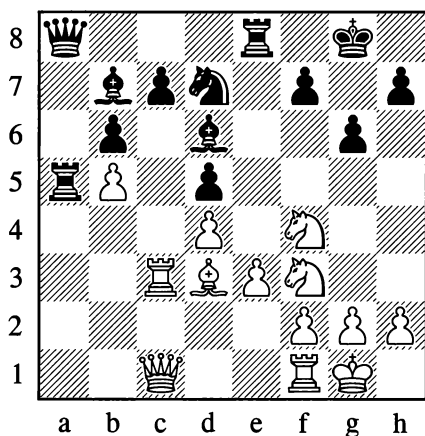
The inclusion of 19.♘g3! and 19...g6 amplifies the strength of this sacrifice because of the newfound weaknesses around

the black king. The d6-bishop was the glue holding the black position together. After its removal everything will be weak.

20...♙xc7 21.♖xc7 ♜c8 22.♖f4

White has more than enough compensation for the exchange. His position is both very stable and very active, and many of his pieces are already gathered near the black monarch.

19...g6



20.h4!

The h-pawn is used as a battering ram; a standard plan in such pawn formations. Note how after tying the black pieces to the weak c7- and d5-pawns, White switches tracks and aims to attack on the kingside where the second weakness is located.

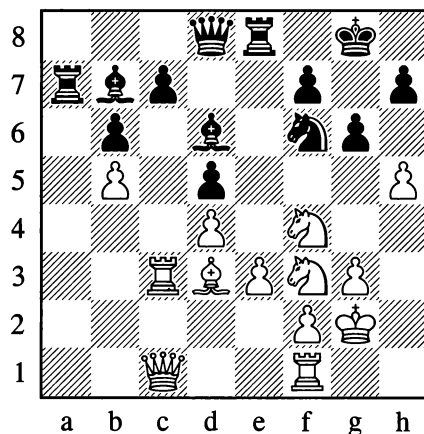
20...♛d8

This is Black's best option. The queen had no active prospects on the queenside so returning to the defence on the other side of the board is most logical. At the same time, it speaks volumes about how much easier it is to play White that it was only a few moves back when ...♛d8-a8 was played. The queen moved back and forth aimlessly because Black had no active prospects.

21.g3!?

White wants to include the f1-rook in the attack with ♖g2 and ♖h1.

21...♞a7 22.♕g2 ♜f6 23.h5



23...♛d7?

As is often the case, the defending side cracks under pressure and misses the correct path.

23...♜e4! should have been played: 24.hxg6 (24.♞c2?! is not an option as after 24...g5! White has to start going backwards without having really achieved anything on the kingside.) 24...hxg6 25.♙xe4 dxe4 26.♜e5! White banks on the activity of his pieces, but Black's position also improved a lot during the last few moves. The game remains unclear.

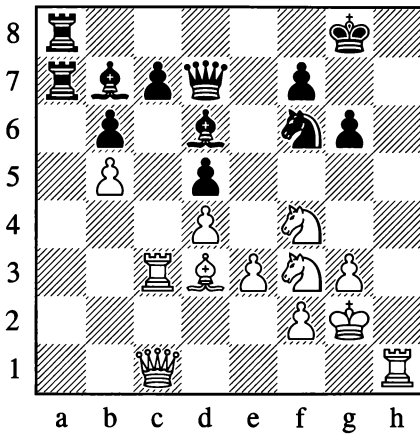
24.♞h1!

A new attacker joins in the fun.

24...♞ea8?

Another mistake in an already difficult position. The rook will not prove to be useful on the a-file, while it will be sorely missed from the centre and kingside.

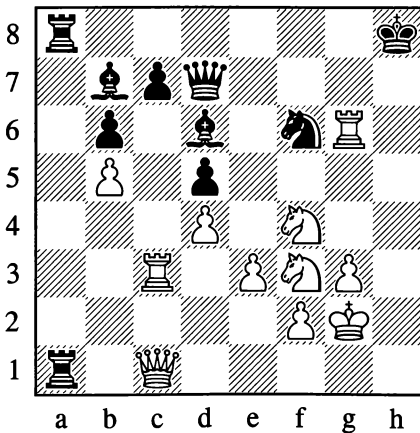
25.hxg6 hxg6



26. ♕xg6!

A natural strike, destroying the shelter of the opponent's king. It is extremely logical to do this when Black's two rooks and the b7-bishop are far away, while White is attacking with almost all his pieces.

26...fxg6 27. ♖h6! ♜a1 28. ♖xg6† ♔h8
29. ♖h6† ♔g8 30. ♖g6† ♔h8



31. ♖xf6!

A magnificent queen sacrifice, simply removing the last defender of the black king despite the white queen hanging and Black already having an extra piece. White has accurately calculated his way to victory.

31...♜8a2

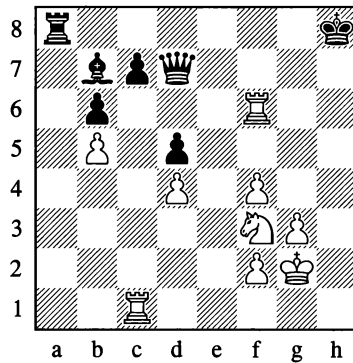
Taking the queen on offer wouldn't help:

31...♜xc1 32. ♖xc1

Threatening ♖f6-g6 when ♜c1-h1 would be unstoppable.

32...♔xf4 33. exf4

This exchange had to be done to remove the strong f4-knight from the attack but, even without it, Black is unable to protect his king.

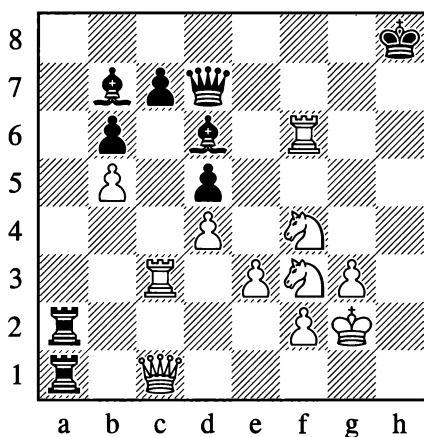


33...♔c8

33...♜e8 34. ♖h1† ♔g7 35. ♖hh6 ♜xb5
36. ♖hg6† ♔h8 37. ♖g4 ♜d7 38. ♔e5 ♜xg4
39. ♔xg4 wins.

34.f5

A beautiful picture. Even though White has only one rook and two pawns for the opponent's queen, his initiative and the activity of his pieces totally paralyze Black. There is no defence against the incoming onslaught on the kingside.



32. ♖xc7!

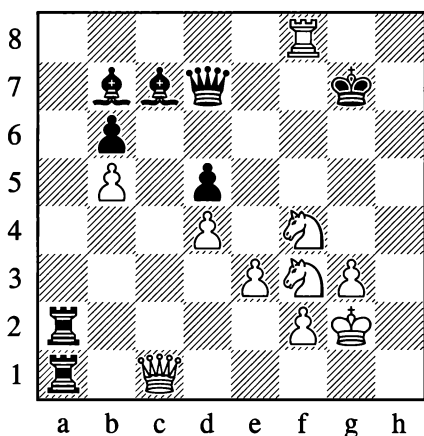
Stylish and tactically brilliant, but at the same time logical and elegantly simple. White wants to use every one of his pieces to their maximum potential. He finds a tactical way to involve his queen and rook which were seemingly stuck on the queenside, far from the rest of his pieces.

32... ♙xc7

32... ♖xc7 does not help: 33. ♖f8+ ♔h7 (33... ♔g7 34. ♘e6+ wins.) 34. ♖xc7+ ♙xc7 35. ♖f7+ ♔g8 36. ♖xc7 Black can resign.

33. ♖f8+ ♔g7

33... ♔h7 might have lasted a bit longer although 34. ♖c3 and 34. ♘g5+ both win without too much difficulty.

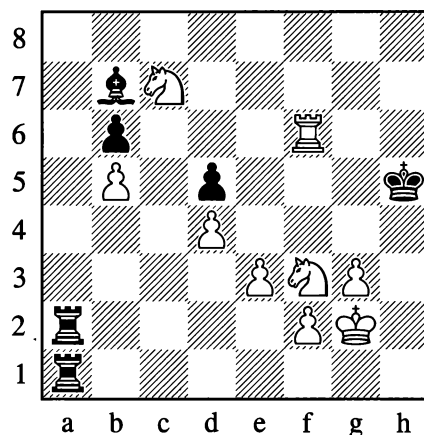


34. ♖xc7!

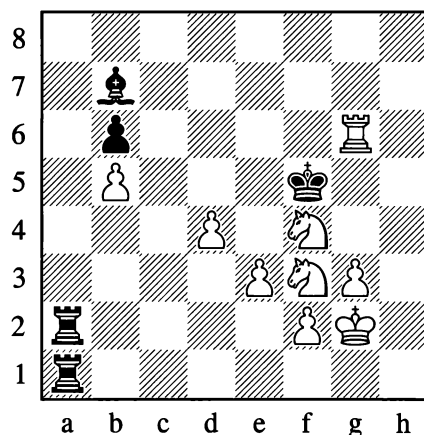
The point of White's combination.

34... ♖xc7 35. ♘e6+ ♔h6 36. ♖f6+ ♔h5 37. ♘xc7

White is already up material, but that's completely irrelevant. The black king is in a mating net.



37... ♙c8 38. ♘xd5 ♙b7 39. ♘f4+ ♔g4 40. ♖g6+ ♔f5



41. g4+

Black resigned, as the game would end in a picturesque mate after 41... ♔e4 42. ♘g5#. It was a magnificent show of his positional and tactical abilities by the young Armenian star.

1-0

It's not every day that we get the pleasure of witnessing games of such beauty. White in essence did everything right, and was rewarded by Caissa with a chance to deliver a stunning finish, which he duly accepted.

His plan started to unfold with 14.b5!, fixing the c7-pawn, and was consistently followed up with 16.♙c3!, planning to slowly but surely manoeuvre his bishop to a3 and increase the pressure on c7. When Black took the c3-bishop White thought he couldn't crash through on c7 because he didn't have the needed firepower. In reality, 19.♘g3! and 20.♞xc7! existed but, as he missed (or misevaluated) that option, he went for the next best thing: an attack on the kingside. The black pieces stranded on the queenside, left there to protect previously important weaknesses, could not withstand the ferocious attack that followed. Granted, Black helped a little with two unfortunate decisions (23...♞d7? and 24...♞e8?), but White's refutation was perfectly executed.

Stretching your opponent's defences to the maximum is a common and effective tool in your efforts to convert an initiative. Don't get fixated on one of your opponent's weaknesses or a specific area of the chessboard. The solution might hide further away, in an area that's currently seemingly irrelevant. The most common secondary target is the opponent's king.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, we studied the relationship between exchanges and the initiative, which we consider one of the most intriguing and important positional factors in any game we play.

We saw examples showcasing that “activity matters most”, underlining the importance of the initiative even in the later stages of the game. Next, we claimed that seizing the initiative is worth more than a pawn, showing examples where achieving a favourable exchange was beneficial even through a pawn sacrifice. We followed up with some examples where one of the sides traded off all their opponent’s active pieces, once again guaranteeing an initiative for themselves.

Afterwards, we embarked on a discussion on material “relevance”, first showing how “not all activities are created equal” and then tackling the problem head-on, claiming that “material is just another positional factor” and showing how that influenced the players’ decisions in the excellently handled complications of the game between Carlsen and Vachier-Lagrave.

Subsequently, we talked about the strength of a mobile pawn centre and then embarked on tackling one of the most misunderstood types of imbalances, the opposite-coloured bishops, showing how their mere presence can serve as the determining factor of who gets the initiative. Up next was the crucial topic of “exchanging to create an entry point”, followed by “poking and prodding” the opponent’s weaknesses, and exchanging for a single tempo; all of them being handy tools in seizing or increasing the initiative.

Finally, we examined the relationship between exchanges and tactics, delved into how exchanges can help repel the initiative and concluded with a masterpiece on the principle of two weaknesses.

We hope that after reading through this work you’ll come to understand the fascinating world of chess exchanges a little better and that our tips throughout these chapters will help you score some important points, and perhaps a few beautiful victories.

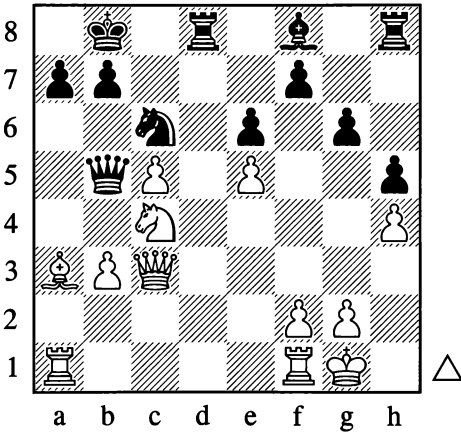
Don’t go just yet – a final set of exercises awaits you!

Exercises

Hikaru Nakamura – Rasmus Svane

Gibraltar 2019

5-1

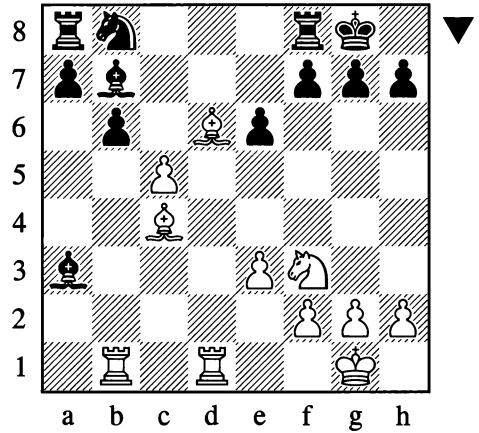


White to play

Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So

St. Louis 2019

5-3

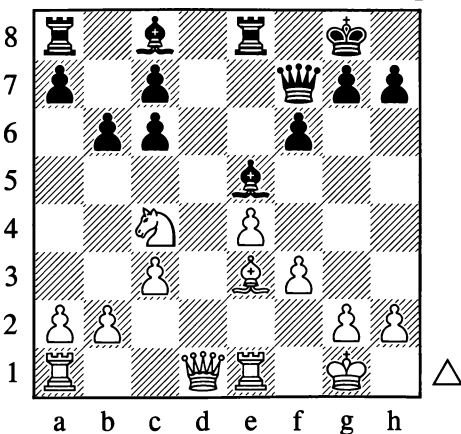


Black to play

Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Eric Hansen

Oslo (hybrid-rapid) 2022

5-2

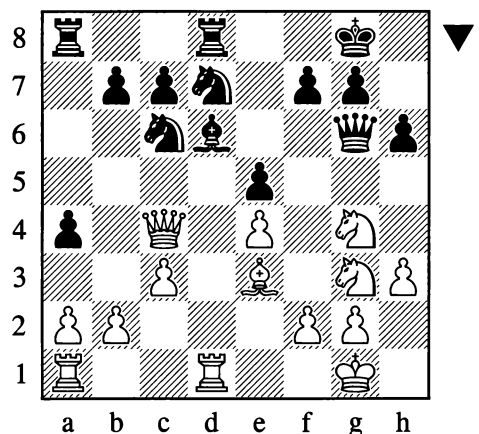


White to play

Leinier Dominguez Perez – Wesley So

Bucharest 2022

5-4

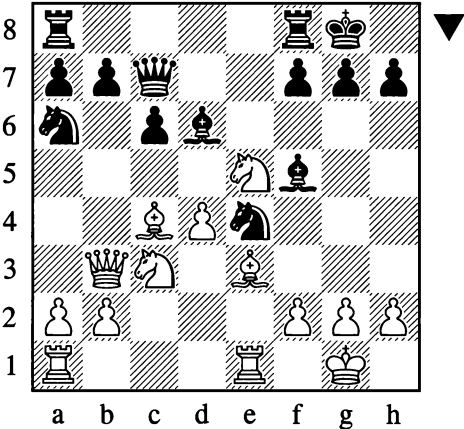


Black to play

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Bogdan-Daniel Deac

Bucharest 2022

5-5

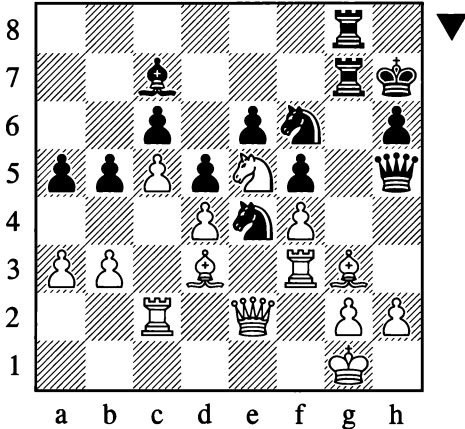


Black to play

Etienne Mensch – Amir Bagheri

Noyon 2005

5-7

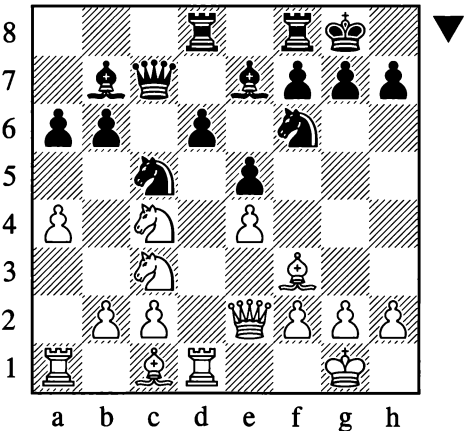


Black to play

Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa – Wei Yi

Internet (rapid) 2022

5-6

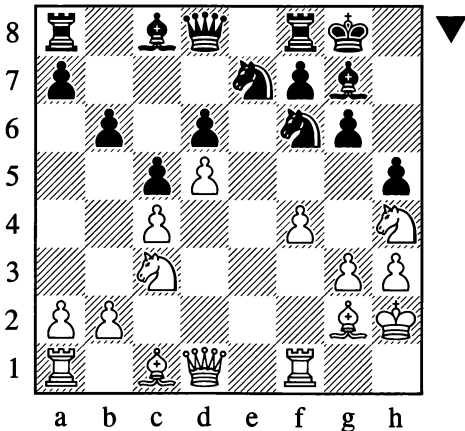


Black to play

Romain Edouard – Marc Andria Maurizzi

Chartres 2022

5-8

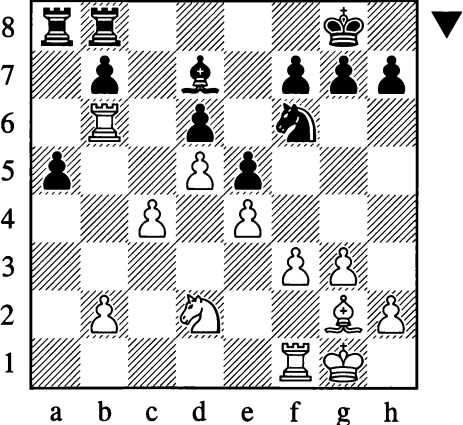


Black to play

Michael Kuraszkiewicz – Amir Bagheri

Warsaw 2005

5-9

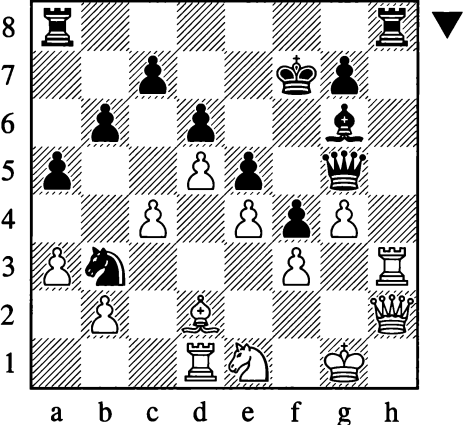


Black to play

Helgi Ass Gretarsson – Hjorvar Steinn Gretarsson

Kopavogur 2021

5-10

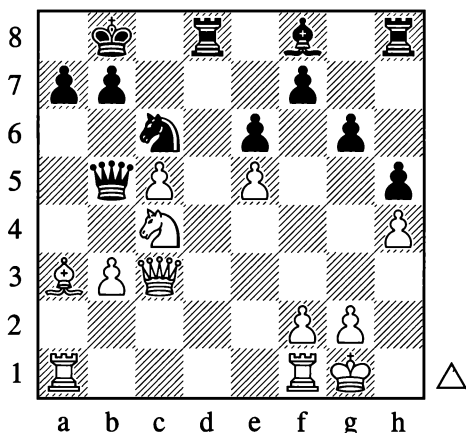


Black to play

Solutions

5-1. Hikaru Nakamura – Rasmus Svane

Gibraltar 2019



20. ♖d6!

White forces the exchange on d6 to improve his pawn structure and open the long diagonal for his queen.

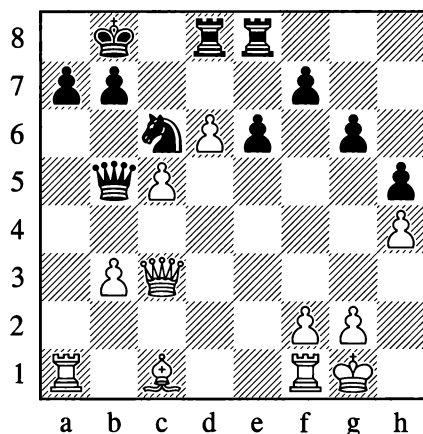
20... ♙xd6 21. exd6

White gains the initiative due to the protected passed pawn on d6, the more active queen and Black's weak dark squares.

21... ♜he8 22. ♙c1?!

The bishop should eventually be improved, but White should have prioritized controlling the b4-square before manoeuvring his bishop.

22. f4 with the idea of ♜fe1 and ♜e4, covering the b4-square, would be one of the more human ways to increase White's advantage.



22... ♜d7?

A mistake in a difficult position.

Black should have tried to exchange queens: 22... ♜b4 23. ♜e3 ♜d4 24. ♜xd4 ♙xd4 Some of the pressure is relieved. Of course, White still has a significant advantage due to the powerful pawn on d6 and Black's dark-square weaknesses.

23. ♙e3 e5 24. f4!?

Nakamura wants to activate his f1-rook.

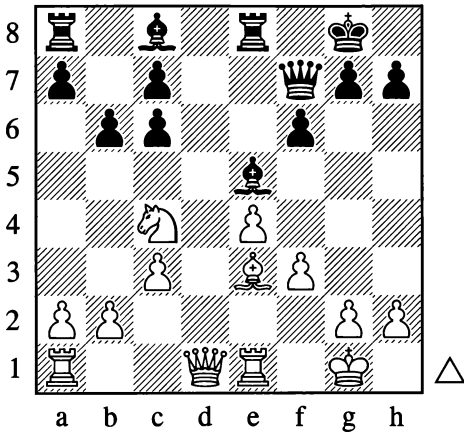
24... exf4 25. ♙xf4 ♙b4 26. ♙g3 ♜c8?! 27. ♜xf7!

Tactical blows are the fruits we harvest after good positional play. Black resigned.

1-0

5-2. Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Eric Hansen

Oslo (hybrid-rapid) 2022



16. Δxe5!

As we have seen in this chapter, the initiative is especially important in positions with opposite-coloured bishops.

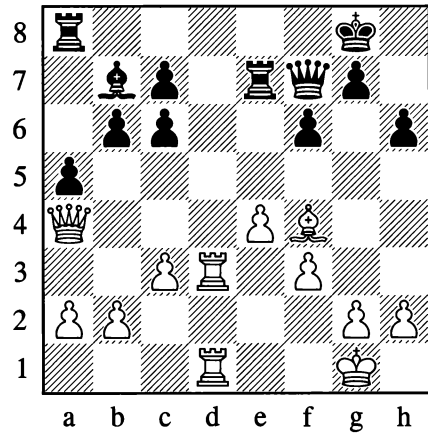
16...♞xe5 17. ♔f4 ♞e8 18. ♞a4! ♔b7

18...c5 can be met with 19. ♔xc7 ♔d7 20. ♞a3 and Black has no compensation for the pawn deficit.

19. ♞ad1 ♞e7 20. ♞e3 a5 21. ♞ed3

Duda dominates the only open file.

21...h6



22. ♞b3!

White exchanges queens as the black queen is one of the few defenders of the dark squares and the seventh rank.

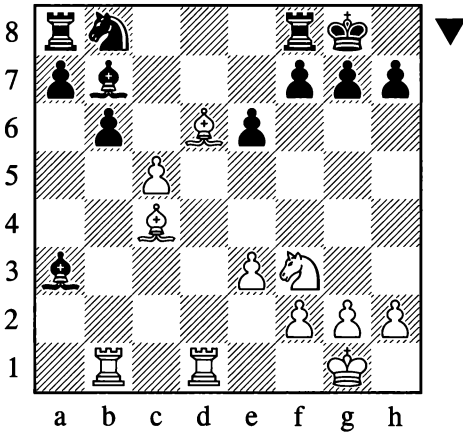
22...♞xb3 23. axb3

White has a significant advantage. His pieces are much more active than their counterparts and his kingside pawn majority is another advantage. The c7-pawn is weak, and the white rooks are ready to enter the seventh rank any moment now. Duda eventually won a nice technical game.

...1-0

5-3. Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So

St. Louis 2019



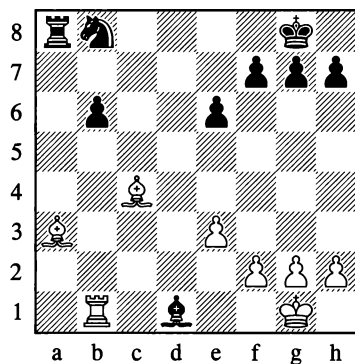
16...xf3!

A well-timed exchange by Black, who starts trading pieces to repel the initiative and secure equality.

16...c8?? loses to 17.c6.

17.gxf3

Another option was: 17.fxf8 fxd1 18.cxb6 axb6 19.fxa3

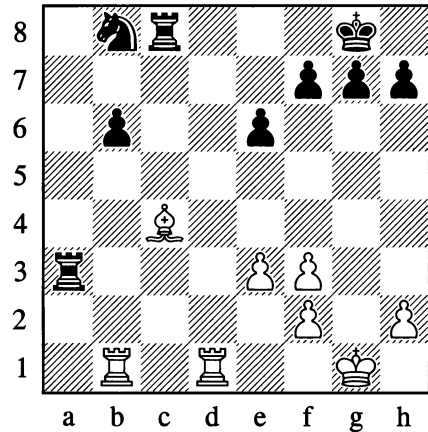


19...f2 (But not 19...fxa3??, due to 20.fxd1 c6 21.f2b5 and White wins.) 20.fxb6 d7 The position is balanced. White's bishop pair doesn't mean a whole lot with all the pawns on the same side.

17...c8 18.cxb6 axb6 19.fxa3

19.fxb6 also leads nowhere after 19...d7 20.f2b7 d6 with equality.

19...fxa3



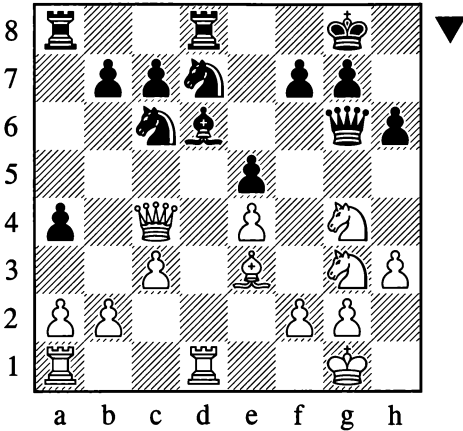
Black has already secured complete equality. The players continued for a few more moves before agreeing to the inevitable draw.

20.fxb6 c3 21.f2bd6 f8 22.f2d8+ f2xd8 23.f2xd8+ f2c7 24.f2xb8 f2xc4 25.f4 c7 26.f2a8 f2d7 27.f2b8 f2c7 28.f2a8 f2d7 29.f2b8 f2c7

1/2-1/2

5-4. Leinier Dominguez Perez – Wesley So

Bucharest 2022



20...♙e6!

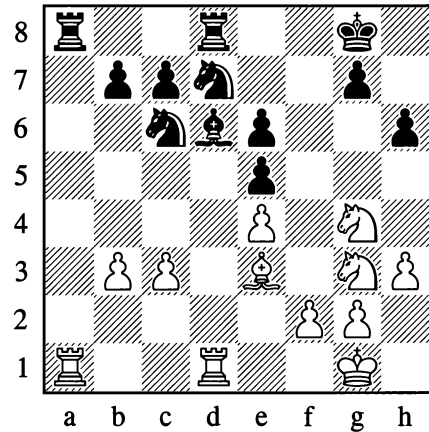
Excellent judgment! The black queen was out of play on g6. Wesley correctly evaluates that controlling the important f5- and d5-squares is more important than doubling his pawns on the e-file. It is hard for White to attack these pawns anyway.

20...♘e7 is another good move, approved by the engine. Black simply controls the f5-square, stopping White from playing ♘f5. Despite that, the game continuation should be preferred by a human as it gives Black easier, more straightforward play, rather than a path where he needs to continue manoeuvring precisely to maintain full equality.

21.♙xe6

White achieves nothing with either 21.♙e2 ♙f8 or 21.♙b5 ♘e7, as in both cases the black queen is extremely strong on e6.

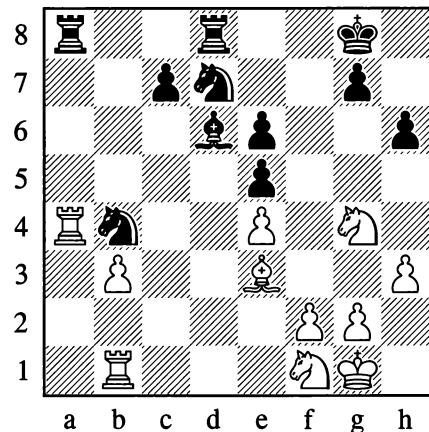
21...fxe6 22.b4 axb3 23.axb3



23...♘a5

Black starts playing actively on the queenside, the area of the board where the white knights are out of play.

24.♙db1 b5 25.♘f1 b4 26.♙a4 ♘c6 27.cxb4 ♘xb4



Black has achieved a comfortable position. His pieces are extremely active, and he could even start thinking about playing for the full point.

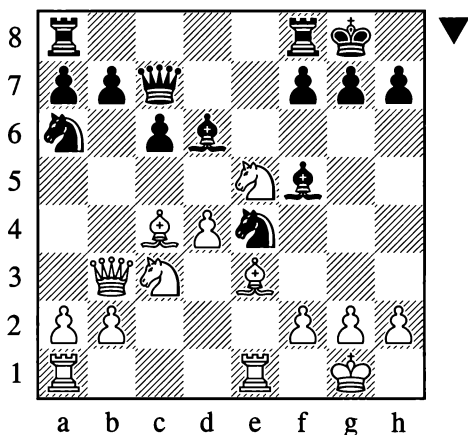
28.♙xa8 ♙xa8 29.♙d2 ♘c6 30.f3 ♘d4 31.b4 ♙a2 32.♘ge3 ♘b6 33.♙e1 ♘e2† 34.♙h2 ♘d4 35.♙g1 ♘e2† 36.♙h2 ♘d4

Black's active pieces have completely compensated for his weak pawn structure. The players agreed to a draw.

½–½

5-5. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Bogdan-Daniel Deac

Bucharest 2022



The black knight on a6 is out of action. Using tactical means, Black manages to exchange it with the opponent's powerful central knight on e5.

14...♞xc3! 15.bxc3

In the event of 15.♙xa6 bxa6 16.♚xc3 c5 Black equalizes completely.

15...b5

Playing 15...♞c5 immediately was also perfectly fine.

16.♙f1 ♞c5!

We've seen this idea before. Do you remember when?

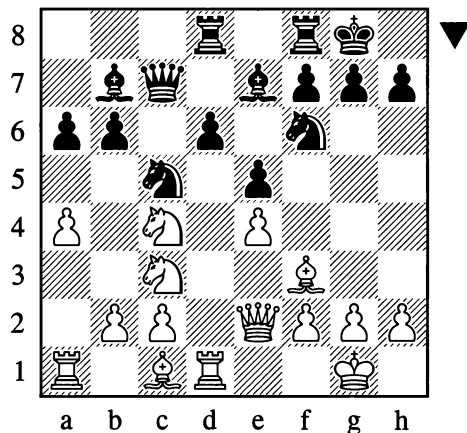
**17.♚d1 ♙e6 18.♙f4 ♞d7 19.♙d3 ♞xe5
20.dxe5 ♙e7**

Black has solved all his problems.

...½–½

5-6. Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa – Wei Yi

Internet (rapid) 2022



Black has a lot of weaknesses, and his bishop on e7 is passive. Wei Yi solves his problems by using a tactical trick.

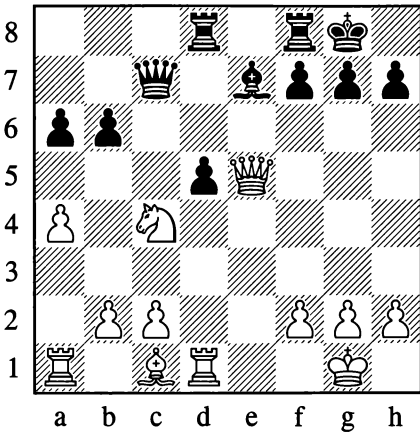
15...♞cxe4!

A familiar combination in such positions.

Trying to stop ♙g5 with 15...h6? is bad: 16.♙e3! ♜b8 17.♙xc5! ♚xc5 18.♞e3 The outpost on d5 and the weakness of the pawn on d6 give White a favourable position.

15...♞fxe4 leads to the same thing.

**16.♞xe4 ♞xe4 17.♙xe4 ♙xe4 18.♚xe4 d5
19.♚xe5**



19...dxc4!

Black had to see this move at the start of the combination. Without it, he would be losing a piece!

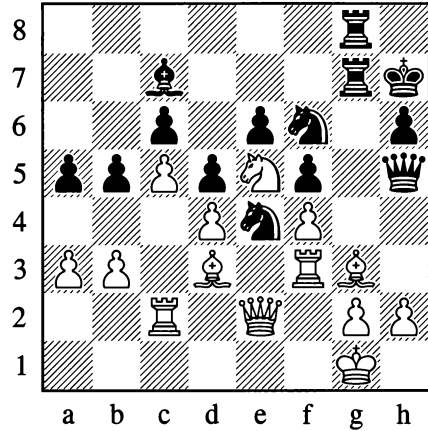
20.♙f4 ♜xd1† 21.♞xd1 ♜d8 22.♞xd8† ♞xd8 23.g3 ♙f6

Black has no more weaknesses or passive pieces and has achieved full equality.

...½–½

5-7. Etienne Mensch – Amir Bagheri

Noyon 2005



34...♞xg3!

Black forces the desired exchanges and transitions to a winning endgame.

34...♙xe5 35.fxe5 ♞xg3 and **34...♘xg3 35.♞xg3 ♞xg3** lead to the same thing.

35.♞xg3

If **35.hxg3**, then **35...♙xe5 36.fxe5 ♘g4 37.♞d1 ♞h2† 38.♙f1 ♘e3†! 39.♞xe3 ♞h1† 40.♙e2 ♞xg2† 41.♙e1 ♞g1† 42.♙f1 ♞xe3†** and Black wins.

35...♙xe5!

Eliminating the strong knight.

36.fxe5 ♘xg3 37.♞xh5

After **37.hxg3 ♘g4** White is busted.

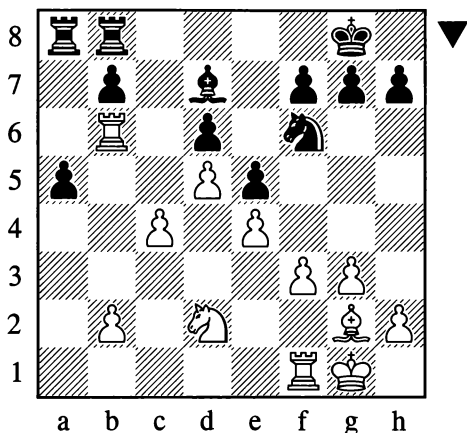
37...♘fxh5 38.hxg3 ♞xg3

Black is completely winning.

...0–1

5-9. Michael Kuraszkiewicz – Amir Bagheri

Warsaw 2005



22...♖a6!

In a position where it looked like Black was in trouble, he finds a clever way to activate his pieces.

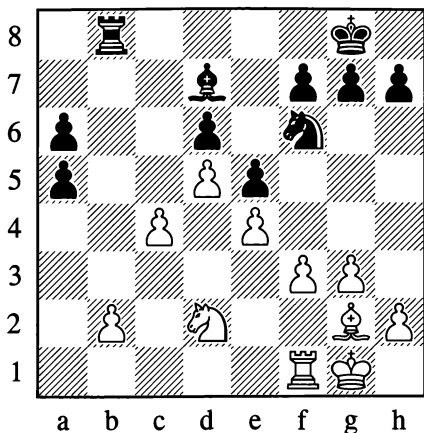
23.♞xa6

23.♞b3 ♕e8 with the idea of ...♘d7 led to an equal position.

After 23.c5 Black can play 23...♞xb6 (but not 23...dxc5 24.♘c4 and White seizes the initiative) 24.cxb6 ♞c8 and equalize comfortably.

23...bxa6

Doubled pawns are not always bad!

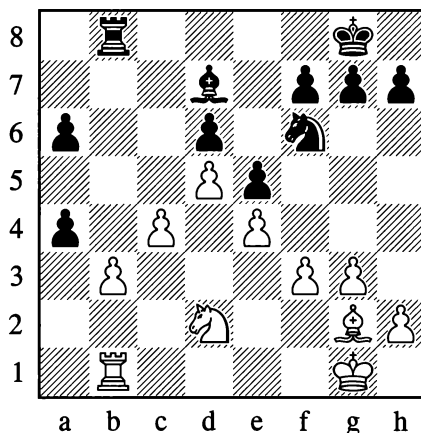


24.b3?!

24.♞b1 was better, with the idea of transferring the king to the queenside.

24...a4 25.♞b1?

Correct was: 25.♞a1! axb3 26.♞xa6 b2 27.♘b1 ♘e8 28.♙f2 f5 29.♙e3 With a complicated endgame offering chances for both sides.



25...a5?!

A careless move.

It would be better to keep the pawn on a6, to stop White from ever playing ♘b5, obtaining counterplay against the d6-pawn: 25...axb3! 26.♘b3 ♕a4 27.♘d2 ♞xb1† 28.♘b1 ♙f8 Black has a nice advantage as his bishop is much better than the opponent's, and his knight has a bright future on c5. The a-pawn is perfectly placed for the time being, preventing a future ♘b5, but it will eventually start running, becoming Black's most valuable asset.

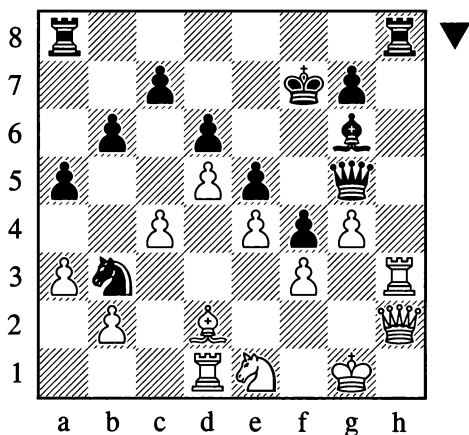
26.bxa4 ♞xb1† 27.♘b1 ♕xa4

Black has a slight advantage, and he went on to win.

...0-1

5-10. Helgi Ass Gretarsson – Hjorvar Steinn Gretarsson

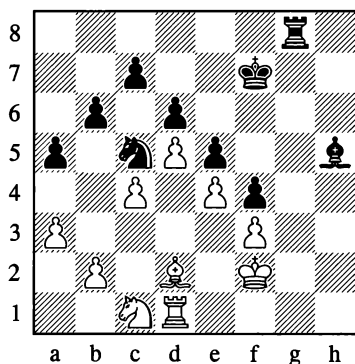
Kopavogur 2021



26...♖h6!!

An excellent move to seize the initiative.

26...♖xh3 27.♗xh3 ♖h6! also offers Black a good advantage. For example: 28.♗xh6 gxh6 29.♘d3 ♖g8 30.♘c1 ♘c5 31.♙f2 h5 32.gxh5 ♗xh5



Black threatens ...♘e4 and if 33.♖h1, then after 33...♗xf3! 34.♙xf3 ♖g3† 35.♙e2 ♖g2† 36.♙d1 ♘e4 37.♗e1 ♖xb2 Black's active pieces and two connected passed pawns ensure his superiority. However, the game continuation is even stronger.

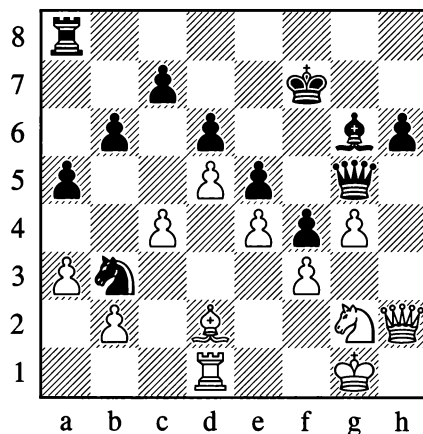
27.♖xh6

27.♗g2 ♖ah8 28.♖xh6 gxh6 is similar to the game.

27...gxh6

By changing the structure with ...gxh6, Black has given himself the chance to break the white pawn chain on the kingside with ...h6-h5.

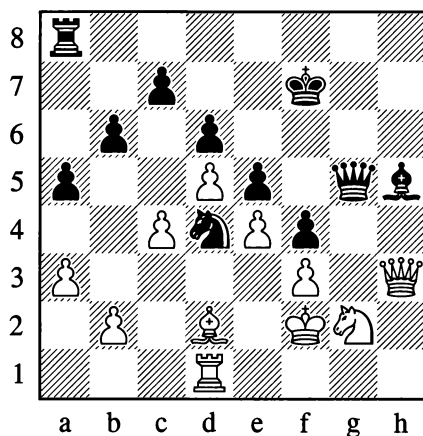
28.♘g2



28...h5

It would have been better for Black not to rush with the pawn break and bring his knight to the centre first: 28...♘d4! 29.♗h3 h5 With a winning position. Still, the game continuation is also very strong.

29.gxh5 ♗xh5 30.♗h3?! ♘d4 31.♙f2



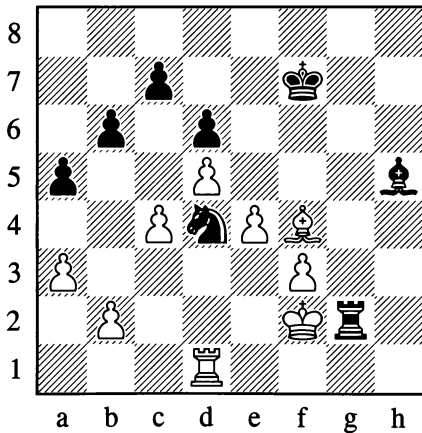
31...♖g8

Easier was 31...♙xf3 32.♞g1 ♞g8 and Black wins.

32.♜xf4 exf4??

Black throws away all his advantage.

He could have easily won the game after 32...♙xf3, when 33.♞d7† looks scary, but is just one check. After 33...♜f6 White can resign.

33.♙xf4 ♞g2† 34.♞xg2 ♞xg2†**35.♜xg2??**

A big miss. White finally crumbles under the pressure and blunders just two moves away from equality.

35.♜f1! ♙xf3 36.♞xd4 is just a draw.

35...♙xf3† 36.♜f2 ♙xd1

Black is completely winning, and the game ended in a few moves.

37.e5 ♜f5 38.b4 a4 39.exd6 cxd6 40.♙g5 ♙b3

White resigned.

0-1

Name Index

A		
Abdusattorov	54, 58	Dimakiling 57, 68
Abramson	126	Ding Liren 174, 176, 195, 197
Adly	56, 67	Dominguez 243, 245, 253, 261, 333, 339
Agrest	55, 63	Donchenko 96, 179
Akopian	193	Dourerassou 286
Alekhine	43	Draskovic 233
Amonatov	309	Dreev 55, 60, 107, 114
Anand	44, 45, 47, 55, 62, 148, 231, 232	Duboue 315
Anderssen	7	Dubov 93
Andersson	9	Duda 243, 252, 300, 301, 302, 333, 337
Andreikin	269	Dudukin 235
Areshchenko	112, 120	Dvoretzky 7, 269
Arestanov	242, 247	
Aronian	163, 169, 181, 183, 212	E
Azmaiparashvili	30	Edouard 334, 342
B		Eljanov 56, 65
Bacrot	29	Erigaisi 111, 116, 242, 244, 246, 257, 282
Bagamasbad	190	Esipenko 42, 43, 51, 54, 58, 59, 278, 279, 280
Bai Jinshi	29	
Balogun	158	F
Bartel	155, 157, 305, 306, 307	Fernando Cubas 245, 253, 261
Bellahcene	52, 131	Firouzja 81, 82, 92, 109, 124, 318, 319
Bologan	99	
Boruchovsky	311	
C		G
Carlsen	(139 page entries)	Galego 313
Caruana	23, 24, 38, 54, 59, 124, 125, 243, 251, 252, 292, 293, 294	Gashimov 87, 88
D		Georgiev 221, 223
Dao	18, 210	Ghosh 146
Dautov	110, 115	Giannoulakis 96, 179
Deac	334, 340	Giri 38, 39, 54, 59, 79, 88, 300
Delchev	141	Goganov 42
Delgado Ramirez	75	Gomez 163, 165
Demchenko	92, 109	Grandelius 242, 246
Demuth	280	Gretarsson, Helgi Ass 335, 344
		Gretarsson, Hjorvar Steinn 335, 344
		Grischuk 93, 143, 145
		Gunbayar 139

Gupta	244, 257, 326	M	
Gurevich	30, 265	Maghsoodloo	56, 57, 67, 68, 305
H		Mamedyarov	243, 253, 267, 303
Halkias	94	Marchand	56, 68
Hansen	333, 337	Mastrovasilis	282
Harikrishna	184, 207	Maurizzi	179, 244, 256, 334, 342
Haznedaroglu	163, 167	Maze	244, 256
Heimann	44	Mchedlishvili	54, 58
Hou Yifan	12	Meier	110, 114
Howell	242, 244, 246, 259, 272	Mensch	334, 341
Hracek	238	Mitkov	55, 60, 114
I		Moradiabadi	48, 49, 242, 249
Idani	12, 105, 233	N	
Inarkiev	72, 73	Naiditsch	227, 240
Indjic	244, 254	Nakamura	52, 131, 132, 133, 148, 163, 165, 218, 298, 299, 322, 333, 336, 338
Ivanchuk	85, 87	Navabi	164, 170
J		Nepomniachtchi	54, 59, 267
Jirovsky	103	Nielsen	201
Jobava	242, 246	Nihal	207, 210, 212, 240
Juksta	244, 259	Nimzowitsch	107
K		Nisipeanu	94, 95, 164, 172
Karjakin	216, 274, 275, 276, 300, 301, 303	O	
Karpov	9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 39, 55, 61, 112, 119, 130	Oberhofer	110, 115
Kasparov	88, 313	Oleksiyenko	32, 33
Kavalek	112, 119	Oparin	163, 169
Keymer	34, 38, 210, 212, 240, 263, 265	P	
Korobov	111, 116, 280, 281, 282	Palo	40
Krasenkow	225, 226, 237	Paravyan	28
Kuraszkiewicz	335, 343	Pedersen	56, 64
Kuzmin	104	Petrosian	206
Kveinys	111, 117	Pham	164, 171
L		Pichot	263
Lingnau	82	Praggnanandhaa	334, 340
Loeffler	186		
Lputian	243, 250		

R		U	
Radjabov	163, 165, 201, 202, 322, 323, 324	Unzicker	55, 61
Rapport	29, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 318, 319, 320	V	
Reshevsky	218	Vachier-Lagrave	28, 32, 48, 49, 51, 110, 113, 137, 288, 290, 332, 334, 340
S		Vallejo Pons	8
Sanal	105	Van Foreest, J	51, 100, 103, 110, 111, 114, 116, 118, 244, 254
Sankalp	326	Van Foreest, L	315
Sargsyan	326, 327	Van Wely	149, 150, 245, 262
Sax	201	Vidit	29
Sevian	243, 252	Vitiugov	30
Shahinyan	111, 116	W	
Shevchenko	112, 120, 141, 198, 201	Wang Hao	23
Shirazi	291	Wang Yue	300
Shirov	127, 128, 129, 130, 198, 200, 201	Wei Yi	334, 340
Short	100, 188	Wen Yang	29
Silman	107	Williamson	28
Simagin	126	Wirig	110, 114
Sipila	164, 172	Wojtaszek	54, 58, 89, 90, 278
Sivuk	179	X	
Smyslov	218	Xiong	130
So	81, 82, 92, 94, 109, 110, 113, 205, 295, 296, 333, 338, 339	Y	
Socko	321	Yusupov	7
Stean	7	Yu Yangyi	195
Stefansson	111, 118	Z	
Stevic	82	Zaitsev	17, 18
Svane	333, 336	Zvjaginsev	29
Sutton	28		
T			
Tabatabaei	30		
Tari	133, 152, 155, 243, 251		
Tarrasch	27, 32, 265		
Tomashevsky	25		
Topalov	22, 176, 177, 178		

Game Index

Chapter 1

Francisco Vallejo Pons – Magnus Carlsen , Berlin (rapid) 2015	8
Anatoly Karpov – Ulf Andersson , Stockholm 1969	9
Magnus Carlsen – Hou Yifan , Wijk aan Zee 2015	12
Thien Hai Dao – Amir Bagheri , Rasht 1998	18
Magnus Carlsen – Veselin Topalov , Nanjing 2009	22
Wang Hao – Fabiano Caruana , Ekaterinburg 2021	23
Magnus Carlsen – Evgeny Tomashevsky , Wijk aan Zee 2016	25
David Paravyan – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave , Krasnaya Polyana 2021	28
Sutton – Williamson, email 2014	28
Etienne Bacrot – Vadim Zvjaginsev , Moscow 2010	29
Bai Jinshi – Wen Yang China 2015	29
Santosh Gujrathi Vidity – Richard Rapport , Belgrade 2022	29
Nikita Vitiugov – M. Amin Tabatabaei , Belgrade 2022	30
Magnus Carlsen – Zurab Azmaiparashvili , Khanty-Mansiysk 2005	30
M. Vachier-Lagrave – Mykhaylo Oleksiyenko , Germany 2021	32
Vincent Keymer – Magnus Carlsen , Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden 2019	34
Fabiano Caruana – Anish Giri , Ekaterinburg 2021	38
Davor Palo – Magnus Carlsen , Gausdal 2004	40
Andrey Esipenko – Aleksey Goganov , Moscow 2020	42
Viswanathan Anand – Andreas Heimann , Germany 2021	44
Elshan Moradiabadi – M. Vachier-Lagrave , Krasnaya Polyana 2021	48
Andrey Esipenko – Jorden van Foreest , Wijk aan Zee 2021	51
Hikaru Nakamura – Bilel Bellahcene , Khanty-Mansiysk 2019	52
Andrey Esipenko – Radoslaw Wojtaszek , Struga 2021	54, 58
Nodirbek Abdusattorov – Mikhail Mchedlishvili , Sharjah 2022	54, 58
Fabiano Caruana – Ian Nepomniachtchi , Internet (rapid) 2021	54, 59
Andrey Esipenko – Anish Giri , Wijk aan Zee 2021	54, 59
Nikola Mitkov – Alexey Dreev , Neum 2000	55, 60
Anatoly Karpov – Wolfgang Unzicker , Nice (Olympiad) 1974	55, 61
Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand , Moscow 2013	55, 62
Magnus Carlsen – Evgenij Agrest , Copenhagen 2004	55, 63
Nicolai Vesterbaek Pedersen – Magnus Carlsen , Aalborg (blindfold) 2006	56, 64
Magnus Carlsen – Pavel Eljanov , Wijk aan Zee 2008	56, 65
Parham Maghsoodloo – Ahmed Adly , Sharjah 2021	56, 67
Francois Marchand – Amir Bagheri , Nantes 2005	56, 68
Oliver Dimakiling – Parham Maghsoodloo , Sharjah 2021	57, 68

Chapter 2

Magnus Carlsen – Ernesto Inarkiev , Dubai (rapid) 2014	72
Amir Bagheri – Neuris Delgado Ramirez , Chennai (Olympiad) 2022	75

Magnus Carlsen – Anish Giri , Wijk aan Zee (rapid) 2018	79
Wesley So – Alireza Firouzja , Wijk aan Zee 2020	81
Lingnau – Stevic, Germany 2020	82
Vassily Ivanchuk – Magnus Carlsen , London 2013	85
Vugar Gashimov – Magnus Carlsen , Nanjing 2010	87
Radoslaw Wojtaszek – Magnus Carlsen , Krasnaya Polyana 2021	89
Anton Demchenko – Wesley So , Khanty-Mansiysk 2019	92
Dubov – Grischuk, Internet (blitz) 2022	93
Stelios Halkias – Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu , Terme Catez 2022	94
Lampros Giannoulakis – Alexander Donchenko , Terme Catez 2022	96
Amir Bagheri – Viktor Bologan , Corsica (rapid) 2005	99
Jorden van Foreest – Nigel Short , Malmo 2021	100
Amir Bagheri – Petr Jirovsky , Zagan 1997	103
Pouya Idani – Vahap Sanal , Chennai (Olympiad) 2022	105
Magnus Carlsen – Alexey Dreev , Tbilisi 2017	107
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Wesley So , St. Louis 2021	110, 113
Georg Meier – Jorden van Foreest , Karlsruhe 2020	110, 114
Jorden van Foreest – Anthony Wirig , Chalons en Champagne 2021	110, 114
Andre Oberhofer – Rustem Dautov , Germany 2017	110, 115
Anton Korobov – Jorden van Foreest , Linares 2020	111, 116
Arjun Erigaisi – David Shahinyan , Tsaghkadzor 2021	111, 116
Amir Bagheri – Aloyzas Kveinys , Paris 2004	111, 117
Jorden van Foreest – Hannes Stefansson , Prague 2020	111, 118
Anatoly Karpov – Lubomir Kavalek , Nice (Olympiad) 1974	112, 119
Alexander Areshchenko – Kirill Shevchenko , Kiev (blitz) 2021	112, 120

Chapter 3

Fabiano Caruana – Alireza Firouzja , Wijk aan Zee 2020	124
Vladimir Simagin – Moisei Abramson , Moscow 1960	126
Magnus Carlsen – Alexei Shirov , Drammen 2005	127
Magnus Carlsen – Jeffery Xiong , Isle of Man 2017	130
Hikaru Nakamura – Bilel Bellahcene , Khanty-Mansiysk 2019	131
Richard Rapport – Aryan Tari , Stavanger 2021	133
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Magnus Carlsen , St. Louis 2019	137
Amir Bagheri – Myagmarsuren Gunbayar , Beijing (rapid) 2008	139
Aleksander Delchev – Kirill Shevchenko , Struga 2021	141
Magnus Carlsen – Alexander Grischuk , Monte Carlo (rapid) 2011	143
Magnus Carlsen – Diptayan Ghosh , Internet (rapid) 2017	146
Hikaru Nakamura – Viswanathan Anand , Zagreb 2019	148
Loek van Wely – Magnus Carlsen , Wijk aan Zee 2016	149
Magnus Carlsen – Aryan Tari , Krasnaya Polyana 2021	152
Mateusz Bartel – Magnus Carlsen , Germany 2008	155
Magnus Carlsen – Oluwafemi Balogun , Tbilisi 2017	158
Hikaru Nakamura – Teimour Radjabov , Moscow 2019	163, 165

John Paul Gomez – Amir Bagheri , Dresden (Olympiad) 2008	163, 165
Amir Bagheri – Kivanc Haznedaroglu , Beijing (rapid) 2008	163, 167
Grigoriy Oparin – Levon Aronian , Berlin 2022	163, 169
Amir Bagheri – Shirin Navabi , Teheran 2007	164, 170
Amir Bagheri – Minh Hoang Pham , Nantes 2005	164, 171
Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu – Vilka Sipila , Chennai (Olympiad) 2022	164, 172

Chapter 4

Magnus Carlsen – Ding Liren , St. Louis (rapid) 2017	174
Magnus Carlsen – Veselin Topalov , Nanjing 2010	176
Marc Andria Maurizzi – Vitaly Sivuk , Reykjavik 2021	179
Magnus Carlsen – Levon Aronian , Karlsruhe 2019	181
Magnus Carlsen – Pentala Harikrishna , Stavanger 2016	184
Stefan Loeffler – Amir Bagheri , Warsaw 2005	186
Magnus Carlsen – Nigel Short , London 2010	188
Efren Bagamasbad – Amir Bagheri , Cebu 2007	190
Magnus Carlsen – Varuzhan Akobian , Internet (rapid) 2017	193
Ding Liren – Yu Yangyi , Shenzhen 2018	195
Kirill Shevchenko – Alexei Shirov , Struga 2021	198
Magnus Carlsen – Teimour Radjabov , Stavanger 2013	201
U.V. Nielsen – Sax, Vejle 1994	201
Wesley So – Magnus Carlsen , Internet (rapid) 2017	205
Pentala Harikrishna – Sarin Nihal , Solingen 2022	207
Sarin Nihal – Vincent Keymer , Biel 2021	210
Magnus Carlsen – Levon Aronian , Wijk aan Zee 2015	212
Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin , St. Louis 2018	216
Magnus Carlsen – Hikaru Nakamura , Shamkir 2014	218
Magnus Carlsen – Kiril Georgiev , Dubai (rapid) 2014	221
Magnus Carlsen – Michal Krasenkow , Sanxenxo 2004	225
Magnus Carlsen – Arkadij Naiditsch , Baden-Baden (rapid) 2015	227
Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand , Wijk aan Zee 2019	231
Luka Draskovic – Pouya Idani , Chennai (Olympiad) 2022	233
Ilya Dudukin – Magnus Carlsen , Internet (rapid) 2018	235
Magnus Carlsen – Zbynek Hracek , Germany 2007	238
Baadur Jobava – Arjun Erigaisi , Internet (blitz) 2021	242, 246
David Howell – Nils Grandelius , London 2022	242, 246
Amir Bagheri – Timur Arestanov , Rasht 1998	242, 247
Elshan Moradiabadi – Amir Bagheri , Cebu 2007	242, 249
Amir Bagheri – Smbat Lputian , Warsaw 2005	243, 250
Aryan Tari – Fabiano Caruana , Stavanger 2020	243, 251
Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Samuel Sevian , Krasnaya Polyana 2021	243, 252
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov – Leinier Dominguez Perez , Bucharest 2022	243, 253
Aleksandar Indjic – Jorden van Foreest , Munich 2022	244, 254
Sebastien Maze – Marc Andria Maurizzi , Barcelona 2021	244, 256

Arjun Erigaisi – Abhijeet Gupta , Chennai (Olympiad) 2022	244, 257
David Howell – Karolis Juksta , Chennai (Olympiad) 2022	244, 259
Leinier Dominguez Perez – Jose Fernando Cubas , Chennai (Olympiad) 2022	245, 261
Magnus Carlsen – Loek van Wely , Wijk aan Zee 2013	245, 262

Chapter 5

Vincent Keymer – Alan Pichot , Biel 2021	263
Ian Nepomniachtchi – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov , Bucharest 2022	267
Magnus Carlsen – Dmitry Andreikin , St Petersburg (rapid) 2018	269
David Howell – Magnus Carlsen , London 2010	272
Sergey Karjakin – Magnus Carlsen , New York (rapid 3) 2016	274
Radoslaw Wojtaszek – Andrey Esipenko , Wijk aan Zee 2021	278
Anton Korobov – Adrien Demuth , Terme Catez 2022	280
Arjun Erigaisi – Athanasios Mastrovasilis , Chennai (Olympiad) 2022	282
Amir Bagheri – Jonathan Dourerassou , Thoirigny 2005	286
Magnus Carlsen – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave , Paris (rapid) 2017	288
Amir Bagheri – Kamran Shirazi , Thoirigny 2005	291
Fabiano Caruana – Magnus Carlsen , Baden-Baden 2018	292
Magnus Carlsen – Wesley So , Wijk aan Zee 2018	295
Magnus Carlsen – Wesley So , Internet (rapid) 2021	296
Hikaru Nakamura – Magnus Carlsen , Moscow 2011	298
Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Sergey Karjakin , Krasnaya Polyana 2021	300
Giri – Wang Yue, Beijing 2011	300
Magnus Carlsen – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov , Biel 2018	303
Parham Maghsoodloo – Mateusz Bartel , Munich 2022	305
Magnus Carlsen – Farrukh Amonatov , Khanty-Mansiysk 2005	309
Magnus Carlsen – Avital Boruchovsky , Internet (rapid) 2018	311
Magnus Carlsen – Luis Galego , Reykjavik 2006	313
Peio Duboue – Lucas van Foreest , Chartres 2022	315
Alireza Firouzja – Richard Rapport , Madrid 2022	318
Magnus Carlsen – Bartosz Socko , Germany 2006	321
Teimour Radjabov – Hikaru Nakamura , Madrid 2022	322
Shant Sargsyan – Gupta Sankalp , Sharjah 2022	326
Hikaru Nakamura – Rasmus Svane , Gibraltar 2019	333, 336
Jan-Krzysztof Duda – Eric Hansen , Oslo (hybrid-rapid) 2022	333, 337
Hikaru Nakamura – Wesley So , St. Louis 2019	333, 338
Leinier Dominguez Perez – Wesley So , Bucharest 2022	333, 339
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave – Bogdan-Daniel Deac , Bucharest 2022	334, 340
Rameshbabu Pragnanandhaa – Wei Yi , Internet (rapid) 2022	334, 340
Etienne Mensch – Amir Bagheri , Noyon 2005	334, 341
Romain Edouard – Marc Andria Maurizzi , Chartres 2022	334, 342
Michael Kuraszkiewicz – Amir Bagheri , Warsaw 2005	335, 343
Helgi Ass Gretarsson – Hjorvar Steinn Gretarsson , Kopavogur 2021	335, 344

Understanding Chess Exchanges

Have you ever wondered how chess grandmasters always seem to know which pieces need to be exchanged? Or how an attack is influenced by the number of pieces on the board? When should we keep the queens on, and when should we switch to an endgame?

Understanding Chess Exchanges shares expert insights into using exchanges as a strategic weapon. Your newfound knowledge will then be tested using exercises taken from elite modern practice. With a particular focus on Magnus Carlsen – the master of exchanges – this book reveals the principles behind a vital part of chess strategy.

Chess mastery is the art of knowing when principles should be followed and when they must be broken. This book guarantees that you will not only become familiar with the typical guidelines, but also learn about their exceptions. Filled with tips, principles and practical advice, **Understanding Chess Exchanges** is an invaluable asset to a chess player's arsenal!

GM Amir Bagheri is an experienced player and coach from Monaco, and was the second-ever Iranian to achieve the grandmaster title.

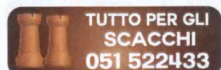
Mohammad Reza Salehzadeh is a FIDE Trainer and respected chess coach from Iran.

€32.99

ISBN 978-1-78483-199-8

\$37.95

LEDUETORRI



SCACCO.IT

QUALITY CHESS

chess.co.uk



9 781784 831998



5 3 7 9 5

Understanding Chess Exchanges

Bagheri & Salehzadeh

